

Anatomies of the Gospels and Beyond

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R. Alan Culpepper

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Anatomies of the Gospels and Beyond

Essays in Honor of R. Alan Culpepper

Edited by

Mikeal C. Parsons
Elizabeth Struthers Malbon
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 The Edward L. Beavin Memorial Lectures, Kentucky Wesleyan College, October 25–26, 1989.
 M. Ray Megginson Research Lectures, Mobile College, March 24, 1993.
 Biblical Lectures, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 1994.
 International lecturer, Society for New Testament Studies of South Africa, March 1997
 (Lectures at the Universities of: Johannesburg [RAU], Pretoria [UNISA], The Orange Free State, and Stellenbosch).
 Inaugural George Walker Redding Lectures, Georgetown College, September 8, 1998.
 International lecturer, Conference on Narrative Criticism, Lausanne, Switzerland, March 2002.
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Prologue

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Introduction

Mikeal C. Parsons, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, and Paul N. Anderson

Alan Culpepper's extensive and long-standing contributions to Johannine studies are well known and extend from his Duke dissertation on the Johannine school in 1974 (published in 1975) to his ground-breaking *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (1983), *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (1994), and a short commentary on *The Gospel and Letters of John* (1998), plus a host of edited volumes, articles, and essays on the historical context, literary patterns, and theological emphases of the Johannine writings.¹ But Alan Culpepper's contributions are not limited to Johannine studies. He has (or soon will have) produced commentaries on all three synoptic gospels: Luke (New Interpreter's Bible, 1995), Mark (Smyth & Helwys, 2007), and Matthew (New Testament Library, forthcoming). He has also been engaged in (re-)considering the relationship of the historical Jesus to gospel (especially Johannine) traditions.² In addition, Alan has served as editor or co-editor of three major New Testament Series, the first of which is the publisher of the present volume.³

The essays in the present volume have been collected to recognize and honor the ways in which Alan Culpepper has shaped our study of the canonical gospels and Christian origins. What follows is a brief overview of the shape and content of this volume, *Anatomies of the Gospels and Beyond*. In acknowledgement of Alan's own breadth of New Testament scholarship, this volume presents five essays on each of the canonical Gospels, plus an additional five essays on texts and issues "Beyond the Gospels." A final tribute to Alan's many contributions to biblical interpretation by Gail O'Day concludes this collection.

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- 1 For details of those writings, plus the bibliographic information on books cited here, see the list of Culpepper's publications elsewhere in this volume.
 - 2 See for example his contributions to the volumes edited by Paul N. Anderson et al. that emerged from the Society of Biblical Literature seminar on John, Jesus, and History.
 - 3 Alan Culpepper was the founding editor of E. J. Brill's Biblical Interpretation Series, and he is the New Testament General Editor of the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary Series and the co-editor of the Johannine Monograph Series (Wipf & Stock).

Gospel of Matthew

Gene Boring's essay, "From Isaiah 40:3 to Matthew 3:3—Intertextuality and *Traditionsgeschichte*," traces the series of interpretations of Isa 40:3 from its 6th-century BCE origin through the Isaiah corpus, Qumran, the LXX, and into the early Christian reinterpretations in Q, Mark, and Matthew. Boring argues that the citation of Isa 40:3 was important in the opening words of both Q and Mark, and that Matthew's own interpretation is influenced by this use of this text at the beginning of each of his two major sources. Thus, Boring's essay models both the older approach of *Traditionsgeschichte* and the newer approach of intertextuality.

Lidija Novakovic, in her essay "Turning the Other Cheek to a Perpetrator: Renunciation or Upholding of Justice?," is also concerned with intertextuality, since the Matthean Jesus' saying she examines is in intertextual relationship with the *lex talionis* in Deut 19:15–21. However, she is not so much concerned with tradition history as with how to interpret the saying in its first-century context, concluding that it represents an alternative way of establishing justice because it is not based on the equivalence of the offense and the punishment but on a restoration of humanness of both the victim and the perpetrator.

Edwin Broadhead raises a question about how we think of "tradition history," arguing in his essay "*Oeuvre Mouvante*: The Gospels as Living Traditions" that the Gospel of Matthew is best seen as an *oeuvre mouvante*—as a work in process. Broadhead contends that Culpepper's initial focus on the text of the Gospel of John as a product of a Johannine school and his later focus on the Johannine community come closer to the reality of how the gospels of the New Testament are composed, what they are, and how they function, although Culpepper's more influential literary work sheds important light on what the gospels do when read as fixed manuscripts and as narratives.

David Barr's essay, "So What's the Story? The Role of Plot in Reading Matthew's Gospel," follows the implications of Culpepper's exemplary narrative analysis of the Gospel of John in examining a variety of scholarly proposals for understanding Matthew's plot. Barr seeks to clarify the present situation and evaluate the gains made in understanding Matthew's Gospel by focusing on its plot as a narrative, concluding that literary works, including ancient ones, can—and should—be read in more than one way, depending on the work and depending on the reader.

Janice Capel Anderson illustrates how various readers over time have in fact read Matthew's story of the flight to Egypt in her essay, "Jesus Was a Refugee: Reception of Matthew 2:13–23." Opening with a narrative critical reading (as

Barr also provides), Anderson proceeds to highlighting modern critical readings that focus either on intertextual echoes (something both Boring and Novakovic consider) or on the first-century imperial context (also considered by Novakovic), and then moves on to how some readers filled and fill a gap in the narrative between the Holy Family's flight to Egypt and their return, including stories, art, pilgrimage, and the recent contextual North East Indian tribal reading of Zhodi Angami. Thus, Anderson's look at the reception history of this one story in Matthew's Gospel also illustrates how the text of Matthew remains a "work in progress" (as Broadhead suggests). Clearly, Matthean scholarship is also an *oeuvre mouvante*—including *Traditionsgeschichte* (both traditional and re-conceived), intertextuality, narrative criticism, and reception history among other approaches.

Gospel of Mark

Clifton Black's essay, "Mark: John's Photographic Negative," begins with the observation that ancient and modern commentators agree that John and the Synoptics complement each other. Black, however, argues that John and Mark are *opposites* with respect to their narrative frameworks, christologies, and presentations of Jesus' disciples. Developing his photographic metaphor, Black asserts that, in Mark, lighter areas are darker; in John, darker areas are lighter. He concludes that the reversal of images binds insoluble elements of the Christian confession, which, of course, is a way of affirming the complementarity of the Gospels of John and Mark.

Elizabeth Struthers Malbon also looks at Mark in relation to John, as well as to Matthew and Luke, but in terms of one spatial variable: Bethsaida, which is referenced in each of the canonical Gospels but nowhere else in the canon. Malbon points out that Bethsaida does not bear the same connotation—basically having to do with the ethnicity of its inhabitants—throughout the Gospels. Although historical documents and archaeological conclusions help interpreters understand the ancient contexts in which the Gospels—and their authors and their audiences—were embedded, only literary criticism, especially narrative criticism, she contends, can help interpreters appreciate the connotative differences of "Bethsaida" in each of the Gospels.

Robert (Bob) Fowler reflects on his recent experience introducing literary criticism, especially narrative criticism and reader response criticism, to graduate students at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome in a class on the Gospel of Mark. Fowler was impressed with an amazingly diverse and

multi-lingual group of students, far exceeding in diversity any class he has encountered in his career. However, he was also made aware that, decades after these approaches have become familiar and widely accepted in the U.S., they are still novel and intriguing in Rome—and in many countries from which students come to Rome.

David Rhoads looks at the paradigm shift from narrative criticism to performance criticism, which is also a shift from analyzing biblical narrative in a modern print medium to the exploration of biblical narratives as witnesses to oral performances in an ancient oral/aural medium. Rhoads contrasts our modern print medium's assumption of a single author writing a fixed text to be read in private and in silence by individual readers with the ancient Mediterranean media world's presumption of the ethos of a predominantly oral culture, a strong role for memory, the activity of scribes writing on scrolls, and performances to communal audiences. Rhoads then offers examples from the Gospel of Mark of various features of an oral performance, how oral performances may have generated a rhetorical impact, and how we might use insights from such studies to reinterpret Mark in an oral ethos.

Joanna Dewey, like Malbon and Fowler, attends to the narrative of Mark's Gospel and also, like Rhoads, to its originating oral/aural context, as she explores, as does Black, the disciples in Mark. Interpreting Mark's narrative in its oral context leads Dewey to affirm that the watershed event is the breaking-in of God's rule at the beginning of the narrative; thus, the question for the disciples becomes: Do they trust and thus participate in God's in-breaking rule? What the disciples (including the women followers) fail to understand is not a matter of cognitive understanding. The disciples in due course recognize Jesus as the Christ; they eventually understand that persecution is part of the way in the present age, even if they are unable to follow through. They fail, Dewey concludes, to trust fully the true power of God now that God's rule is arriving, as seen in the sea and feeding episodes, in Jesus' promises to go ahead of them to Galilee, and in the empty tomb. Clearly twenty-first-century Markan scholarship is as influenced by its context as was Mark's first-century Gospel: narrative criticism and reader response criticism are "novel" in some places and being transformed by performance criticism in other places. Markan scholarship, it seems, will continue to echo Mark's openness and mystery.

Gospel of Luke

With "Illuminating 'Christ Among the Doctors' (Luke 2:41–52) in the Exegetical Tradition and Selected Florentine Renaissance Paintings," Heidi J. Hornik

and Mikeal C. Parsons extend their work on “visual exegesis,” first begun with *Illuminating Luke* (2003). Luke’s depiction of the boy Jesus in the Temple has generated considerable interest over the history of interpretation. Literarily, it stands as a transition between the infancy of Jesus and the beginning of his public ministry. The story is also a canonical example of the subsequent interest in the “hidden life” of Jesus that will preoccupy Christians well into the medieval period and beyond. This essay briefly traces the history of the story in the exegetical tradition. *Jesus among the Doctors* has also been a popular theme across the history of Christian art. Artists of this subject have drawn on Luke 2:41–52, the only canonical Gospel text that describes Jesus as a child (though see also the apocryphal Inf. Gos. Thom. 17). Hornik and Parsons also examine depictions of this scene in three Florentine Renaissance paintings (Giotto, Fra Angelico, and Alessandro Allori), with an eye toward their sources/precedents and the theological, political, and cultural context(s) that gave rise to the paintings, as well as their place in the artists’ oeuvre, stylistic and iconographic features.

In “Disability and Dis-ease: Body, Restoration, and Ethics of Reading in Luke’s Gospel,” John Carroll contributes to a growing body of New Testament scholarship that explicitly attends to ethical dimensions of interpretation. Drawing from recent disability studies and with a special focus on the healing stories in Luke’s Gospel, the reading strategy proposed here by Carroll highlights several features of the Lukan narrative that may help fund an ethically constructive interpretive approach: the personal agency and initiative of characters with impairment; the association of faith and flourishing; concern with social integration and community boundaries; and advocacy on behalf of those with impairment. Discussion of Jesus’ encounter with a man tormented by a “legion” of demons (Luke 8:26–39) and his healing of a woman’s severely bent back (13:10–17) illustrates the reading strategy.

Robert L. Brawley observes that longstanding interpretations have held that Luke allegorized the parable of the Minas to correct false anticipations of the parousia. Even when the parable was considered to be a description of an oppressive king in Roman imperial systems, the focus remained the context of Jesus’ ministry. Brawley notes that Alan Culpepper introduced the notion that in the Lukan context itself the parable was a parody of Jesus’ understanding of the kingdom of God. Richard Vinson and Adam Braun expanded this with particular emphasis on a negative view of kingship in Luke, and both argued that, short of Jesus’ exaltation, this negative view of kingship meant that all allusions to Jesus as a king were erroneous. In “The Parable of the Minas in Lukan Context: Jesus and Kingship, the Carnavalesque, and Intertextuality,” Brawley gives particular attention to two levels of meaning in irony, one superior to the

other, that are in competition in Luke. He also develops two further literary features that reflect two competitive views of reality: the carnivalesque and intertextuality. Carnavalesque mockery attempts to reduce Jesus to absurdity, but Luke's use of scriptural allusions in particular presents a competing perspective according to which Jesus' role in the kingdom of God in his earthly ministry appears as the antithesis of the ruthless king in the parable of the Minas. This is demonstrated especially in the acclamation of Jesus as king in his entrance to Jerusalem, the conferring of thrones on the twelve, and the incident of the penitent malefactor.

Like Carroll and Brawley, John Darr explores some specific passages in the Third Gospel. In his essay, "Murmuring Sophists: Extratextual Elements in Luke's Portrayal of Pharisees," Darr employs the concept of the "extratext" (a term he is widely crediting with inventing) and maps the extratextual repertoire that Luke, the implied author of Luke and Acts, drew upon in his depiction of Pharisees. Like other characters in Luke-Acts, the Pharisees are a hybrid of extratextual elements from Jewish scripture on one hand and Hellenistic popular culture on the other. From the Septuagint, Luke drew upon common imagery of rebellious and recalcitrant types who rejected the authority and words of the prophets. The Israelites who murmured against Moses in the wilderness are primary examples, but one must also take into account other exodus imagery in the Elijah-Elisha material, and in Isaiah. On the Hellenistic side, Luke drew heavily on the pejorative conventions about sophists and their interactions with philosophers. This essay concentrates more on this latter topic because it has received far less attention from scholars than have scriptural types. The essay culminates with an extensive reconstruction of the conventional take on sophists as avaricious, hypocritical, disputatious, and status-seeking, and shows how these typed traits inform and undergird Luke's characterization of Pharisees.

In "Breathing New Life into Narrative Criticism: Postclassical Narratology and the Gospel of Luke," Michal Beth Dinkler explores Alan Culpepper's definitive role in introducing narrative criticism as a new, muscular presence at the table of Johannine studies. Now, over thirty years after Culpepper's grand introduction, the excitement and momentum of narrative criticism's early days have waned, and its once-muscular presence at the methodological table of biblical studies has atrophied. Dinkler contends that postclassical narratology has the potential to breathe new life into narratological New Testament study. The purpose of her essay is to introduce and commend postclassical narratology to New Testament scholars, and to illustrate its benefits for interpreting the Gospel of Luke using Jesus' so-called "Apocalyptic Discourse" in Luke 21 as a case study.

Gospel of John

Kasper Bro Larsen's essay, "Jesus, God of Old and Newcomer: Rhetorical Character Presentation in John 1–2," shows how the Fourth Gospel wrestles with a rhetorical problem: How may Jesus, a recent newcomer in Jewish and Roman history, gain authority in a context where it is a cultural given that "the most ancient is best" (*presbyteron kreitton*)? The first chapters of the Gospel, where the Jesus' character is presented to the audience, testify to this problem and to the evangelist's strategies of approaching it. In the first chapter, the evangelist affirms the cultural given ("the most ancient is best") by building Jesus' authority upon the claim that his status as newcomer is only apparent. In reality, Jesus is the preexistent logos and John the Baptist's predecessor: "He who comes after me ... was before me" (1:15, 30). At the wedding in Cana and the temple incident in chapter two, however, the evangelist attempts an opposite strategy. He now subverts the cultural given by asserting that novelty may in fact in some respects contain positive connotations, as expressed in, for example, the steward's remark at the wedding: "You have kept the good wine until now" (2:10). In John 1–2, this dual strategy of confirmation and subversion of a cultural given serves the common purpose of preparing the *ethos* of Jesus in the subsequent story. This article seeks to identify and further specify the Johannine strategies outlined above and to compare them to theories and practices of character presentation in the ancient rhetorical handbooks (e.g., *prosopopoiia* and *ethos*) and in the oratory of Cicero, who faced similar rhetorical problems of authority as a newcomer and *homo novus* in the Roman senate.

Jan G. van der Watt's essay, "Stereotypes, In-Groups, and Out-Groups in the Gospel of John," addresses the ways that the Fourth Gospel challenges the stereotypical classification of people into in-groups and out-groups. In ignoring stereotypical classifications of Samaritans, women, Greeks (gentiles), Jews, and even officials of the Roman rule, all are presented as welcome within the family of God. This means, for John, that they will all be treated as brothers and sisters, or as friends (15:13–15) within the new community, for whom the gift of eternal life is anticipated as the new dominant reality that determines all existence. This redefinition of social relations and status is framed within the Johannine ethical expectations of love and friendship, and attitudes of openness, unity, and acceptance dominate this ethical approach, according to John's story of Jesus. This situation forms the motivation of the Johannine mission: the will of God is that all should believe in Jesus, resulting in just one group without any out-group, namely, the family of God.

In “There Are No ‘Aporias’: Ancient Media Culture and the Problem of the Fourth Gospel’s Composition-History,” Tom Thatcher challenges the textual bases for the majority of modern diachronic theories regarding John’s authorship and composition. Source-critical and redaction-critical approaches to the composition-history of the Fourth Gospel have frequently appealed to the notorious “aporias” in the text narrative and theological discontinuities in the flow of John’s presentation. These conspicuous “breaks” are typically viewed as literary seams—tangible proof that the Gospel has been stitched together from various earlier sources or/and that the present text is the final draft in a series of revised editions. Thatcher’s essay, however, problematizes this model by suggesting that several key premises of source and developmental theories are inconsistent with the emerging portrait of first-century media culture. While media studies cannot prove definitively that the Gospel of John is a unified composition produced by a single author, they do suggest that it would be impossible to identify its sources or earlier editions with sufficient precision to support complex theories about the history of the text and the community that produced it.

Harold W. Attridge’s essay, “How Johannine Signs Signify (or Don’t),” examines the character and function of the Johannine signs, which build on traditional forms of authenticating the status of Jesus, but “signify” in a new way. Just as John’s riddles entice and provoke in a number of ways, so too the “signs” of Jesus—revealing a feature of his ministry, but at other times functioning ironically or in cajoling ways—challenge the interests of those seeking “signs and wonders” in offering an alternative thrust. Focusing on the “first sign” of Cana and the “signs” performed in Jerusalem, Attridge shows how John’s narrative engages readers in the process of probing all the “signs” to plumb the depths of their significance. Thus, rather than requiring a diachronic approach to composition (one of the “aporias” Thatcher describes), the “signs” that John’s Jesus offers perform an educative function. Their studied polyvalence and pronounced ambiguity engage the reader, provoke reflection, and stimulate a deepening encounter with the Word, embedded both in flesh and in the evangelist’s words. They are part of the evangelist’s quest to present the liberating truth and to stimulate reflection on how it can be known.

In “The Fourth Gospel: A ‘Spiritual’ or ‘Theological’ Gospel,” John Painter observes that, although the earliest view of the Fourth Gospel is that it was a “spiritual Gospel,” written after the “bodily Gospels” (Synoptics), Eusebius attempted to place all four Gospels on a common level of historical accuracy. In spite of this, Augustine treated John as a theological Gospel written from the divine perspective, while the Synoptics portrayed the human Jesus. This

position prevailed until modern times. In 1963, C. H. Dodd set out to show that the Fourth Gospel was based on Synoptic-like tradition, but argued that the tradition was assimilated by the Fourth Evangelist's theological interpretation. More recently, a concerted attempt has been made to show that our image of Jesus has been de-Johannified and the Fourth Gospel de-historicized. Painter argues that the "Johannification" is the Fourth Evangelist's theological interpretation of the Jesus tradition from the perspective of Scripture in the light of the resurrection belief.

Beyond the Gospels

In "The Children of God and the Son of God in the Johannine Gospel and Epistles," Stan Harstine takes up the chiastic structure of John 1:1–18 proposed in one of Culpepper's most important essays. Harstine extends Culpepper's 1980 *New Testament Studies* article on "The Pivot of the Prologue" to include the rest of the Johannine Gospel and Epistles. Culpepper's work identified the center of the structure (i.e., the pivot) at John 1:12b: "and he gave them authority to become the children of God." With van der Watt, Harstine shows that being welcomed into the divine family continues as a theme beyond the Johannine Gospel. Given that Culpepper's original study explored the use of phrases similar to "children of God" in various contemporary sources and its use by the Johannine community, this essay builds on that work but focuses on how this concept is developed throughout the remainder of the Gospel and Epistles of John. Not only does such a study suggest the integrity of the Johannine Prologue, but it also confirms the centrality of this thrust within the rest of the Johannine writings.

Dorothy A. Lee's essay, "Fictive Kinship and its Symbolism in the Literary Structures of 1 John," continues the thrust of van der Watt's and Harstine's essays, showing how the familial thrust of the Johannine Gospel continues in an epistolary context, as the rhetorical genre takes the form of layering through the persuasive argument of the first Epistle. Here, a rhetorical study of the Epistles highlights the symbolism of fictive kinship in the "implied narrative" and literary structures of 1 John, where it plays a key role. Thus, it becomes clear that love lies at the center of this epistle: a love that arises from the archetypal kinship between Father and Son and flows into the mutual, self-giving affection among the ἀδελφοί. What 1 John thus conveys is an understanding of the church that is rooted in covenant and kinship, in an overarching narrative where hatred and fear are the antithesis of familial identity and belonging.

In this way, the first Johannine Epistle carries forth the central familial thrust of the Gospel in its distinctive rhetorical construction.

James H. Charlesworth's contribution, "Discovering Psalm 156 and Its Importance for Early Judaism and Christian Origins," explores the meaning of a newly discovered psalm for ancient and contemporary readers. The psalm was probably composed in Jerusalem, and perhaps in the Temple before 100 BCE, and it reflects the joy of the successes of the early Maccabees and Hasmoneans. As the discovery of Psalm 156 and research upon it enriches evaluations of Early Judaism and Early Christianity, a clearer perception of the adoration of David here emerges, casting light on visionary and prophetic understandings of King David and religio-political views of God's continuing involvement with Israel, his people. The result of this analysis illuminates the fundamental importance of David's legacy for the mind of Jesus and his followers. These reflections also serve to entice other scholars to explore further the anatomy of early Jewish and Christian rhetoric.

Paul N. Anderson's essay, "Encounter, Dissonance, and Reflection in the Dialectical Development of Paul's Theology," explores relations between experience and theological content in the formation of Paul's mission and message. Since the publication of Gerd Theissen's *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology* (1983 in German, 1987 in English), Pauline scholars have taken renewed interest in experiential factors in the formation of Paul's theology, but few have approached the issue in terms of Paul's own faith development in cognitive-critical perspective. Making use of Cognitive-Dissonance Theory (Leon Festinger), Transformation Analysis (James Loder), Stages-of-Faith Theory (James Fowler), and Existential Logotherapy (Victor Frankl), this essay considers the relation between experience and content in the theology of Paul of Tarsus regarding three central features: his encounter on the Damascus road, his sense of mission to Jews and Gentiles, and his personal struggles in the light of perceived divine assistance—or lack thereof. This study offers a cognitive-critical appraisal of Paul's personal theological development in the light of experiential-reflective dialectic.

David B. Gowler connects the work of Alan Culpepper on Luke to its powerful interpretation by Howard Thurman in "Sit and Listen; Go and Do: The Parables of the Good Samaritan and Prodigal Son in Howard Thurman's Life and Thought." In Thurman's interpretations of the open-ended parables of The Good Samaritan and The Prodigal Son, connections with characters in the text emerge in personal and sometimes surprising ways. In using Howard Thurman's work as a set of case studies for interpreting biblical texts meaningfully, this essay suggests ways forward that modern readers might embrace:

moving from the anatomies of biblical texts toward their incarnational applications in their lives. In this way the parables of Jesus are liberated from their conventional domestication, as they cast fresh light on both the loving grace of God and a prophetic call to extend that love to others. If these parables might have shocked original hearers and readers, let today's readers beware; their message might indeed jolt today's readers into reflection, and perhaps even into action, inviting: "Go thou and do likewise."

We are grateful to Greg Barnhill and Nathan Hays for formatting the manuscript and creating the indexes. We are pleased that Brill agreed to publish this collection in its Biblical Interpretation Series, a series Alan edited from 1993–2010, and we are delighted to offer this volume as a small token of our affection for our friend and colleague, R. Alan Culpepper!

R. Alan Culpepper: A Tribute

Mikeal C. Parsons

Richard Alan Culpepper was born to Hugo and Ruth Culpepper in 1946, in Little Rock, Arkansas. After his father abandoned plans to pursue medical studies, the Culpeppers resumed their work as Southern Baptist missionaries, this time accepting an appointment to the mission field in Santiago, Chile.¹ They served there from 1947–51. A second son, Larry, was born to the Culpeppers in Chile in 1948.² In late 1951, the young family returned to the States, and Hugo worked on a Th.D. in theology at Southern Seminary in Louisville. Hugo then accepted an appointment to teach at the Baptist seminary in Buenos Aires, and the family was in Argentina from 1953–58. Thus, the formative years of Alan Culpepper's childhood were spent as a "missionary kid," first in Chile (ages 1–5) and then in Argentina (ages 7–12), with a brief sojourn in the States.

In 1958, Hugo Culpepper decided to return to Southern Seminary to complete his doctoral studies. He did so—and immediately began teaching at Southern. In the spring of 1963, Hugo was named the first holder of the William O. Carver Chair of Christian Missions and World Religions. That fall, Alan entered Baylor University, where he would earn a degree in Philosophy, graduating *Cum Laude* in the Honors Program in 1967. Just after graduation, Alan married Jacquelyn "Jacque" McClain, whom he had met while they were freshmen at Baylor.

Alan and Jacque returned to Louisville, where Alan had graduated from high school. He began his theological studies at Southern Seminary. His parents had moved to Atlanta in 1965, where Hugo had assumed the role of the Director of the Missions Division of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. While pursuing his M.Div. studies, Alan served as Pastor of Macedonia Baptist Church in Madison, Indiana, from 1968–70. Hugo spoke at his ordination service. Hugo

1 Previously Hugo and Ruth Culpepper had served as missionaries in China (1940–41) before moving to the Philippines to continue their language study. On December 27, 1941, just over two weeks after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, the Culpeppers were part of a group of 500 Americans who were interred at a series of concentration camps. They remained imprisoned until their liberation on February 5, 1945. They were not able to make it back Stateside, however, until April, 1945. See R. Alan Culpepper, *Eternity as a Sunrise: The Life of Hugo H. Culpepper* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), 25–100.

2 Alan notes that his father's interest in medicine was partially realized by Larry's entry into the medical profession. Larry Culpepper currently serves on the medical school faculty at Boston University, having previously served in a similar position at Brown University; see Culpepper, *Eternity as a Sunrise*, 143, 334, 353.

and Ruth returned to the Seminary in Louisville in August 1970, at about the same time that Alan and Jacque departed for Durham, NC, where Alan began doctoral studies at Duke University with D. Moody Smith and W. D. Davies. Alan served as research assistant for Davies (1971–73) and completed his dissertation on the Johannine School in 1974 with Smith as his advisor. That work was published in the Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series in 1975.³

While at Duke, Alan also had the opportunity to serve as a part-time instructor. He taught an introductory Bible class to a group of undergraduates and is fond of recalling the first day of class when he assigned the students to read several chapters from the Bible. One student timidly inquired, “Are you talking about the numbers at the top of the page or the bottom of the page?” When Alan realized the student did not know if the assignment referred to chapter numbers or page numbers, he knew he needed to go back, as they say, to the drawing board!

In the fall of 1973, while Alan was contemplating a job offer at Atlanta Baptist College (which had recently merged with Mercer University), he was invited to join the New Testament Department at his Alma Mater, Southern Seminary, a position he accepted. He began his responsibilities at Southern in February 1974. Jacque and Alan’s two children, Erin and Rodney, were born during the first two years in Louisville.

Alan stayed at Southern until 1991. He advanced up the academic ladder from Assistant Professor (1974–80), to Associate Professor (1980–85), to the James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation (1985–91), a position previously held by A. T. Robertson, Hersey Davies, Ray Summers, Frank Stagg, and George Beasley-Murray. He also served as the Associate Dean in the School of Theology, working primarily in Graduate Studies (1984–87, 1988–91). Alan’s major publication during his Southern years was *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, a book written during his first sabbatical leave in Cambridge, England (1980–81).⁴ This book represented a watershed moment and is widely credited with helping to initiate the “literary turn” taken in New Testament studies in the 1980s.⁵ The book has been translated into

3 R. Alan Culpepper, *The Johannine School*, SBLDS 26 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975; reprint, 2007).

4 R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983). I focus in this brief biography on Alan’s published books and monographs. Of course, he wrote numerous essays and articles, which may be found in the list of publications.

5 See Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

Korean and Japanese and was the topic of a retrospective in 2008 celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of its publication.⁶ During this time, Culpepper was also active in the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) Literary Aspects of the Gospels and Acts Group, serving as its chair from 1986–91. From 1982–91, he served as Managing Editor of the Seminary's journal, *Review & Expositor*. He also supervised a dozen or so doctoral dissertations, many of which were subsequently published.⁷

Pressures resulting from the fundamentalist takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention forced many Southern faculty to take positions elsewhere in church and academy. After the SBC convention in Dallas in 1985, Culpepper recognized that the moderates were in the minority and, in a letter to SBTS President Roy Honeycutt, stated he “saw no reason to believe that we will do significantly better in Atlanta [in 1986] than we did in Dallas.”⁸ Despite this prediction, Alan stayed on at Seminary for another six years, finally accepting an invitation to join the faculty of the Department of Religion at Baylor University, his undergraduate Alma Mater, first as Visiting Professor (1991–92) and then as Professor of Religion (1992–95). The Baylor period was an especially productive time for Alan's research. He published *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (1994)—winner of the 1995 Choice Outstanding Academic Book Award—and the *New Interpreter's Bible* commentary on Luke (1995). He was also Associate Editor (1991–93) and Editor (1993–96) of *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, the journal of the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion.

In 1995, Alan became the Dean of the newly formed McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University in Atlanta, a position he held for twenty years

6 Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008).

7 See, e.g., Paul D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985); Mikeal C. Parsons, *The Departure of Jesus in Luke-Acts: The Ascension Narratives in Context*, JSNTSup 21 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987); David B. Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy and Friend: Portraits of the Pharisees in Luke and Acts*, Emory Studies in Early Christianity (New York: Peter Lang, 1991); Steven Sheeley, *Narrative Asides in Luke-Acts*, JSNTSup 72 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); Edwin K. Broadhead, *Teaching with Authority: Miracles and Christology in the Gospel of Mark*, JSNTSup 74 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); Michael Palmer, *Levels of Constituent Structure in New Testament Greek* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995).

8 Alan Culpepper to Roy Honeycutt, June 21, 1985. Alan Culpepper 1973–89 folder. Honeycutt Papers. SBTS Archives. Cited by Gregory A. Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1859–2009* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 466.

until his retirement in 2015.⁹ In the school's earliest days, Mercer University President Kirby Godsey met with the founding faculty in a classroom, pointed to a whiteboard, and told them to draw up a school as they felt led.¹⁰ The first class was held in 1996 with 44 students. Despite heavy administrative and fund-raising duties as dean, Alan continued to publish. During the McAfee period, there appeared *The Gospel and Letters of John* (1998), a commentary on *Mark* in the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary Series (for which Culpepper also served as NT editor), *Eternity as a Sunrise* (the biography of his father), along with several edited volumes.¹¹ From 1993–2010, Culpepper served as New Testament editor of Brill's Biblical Interpretation Series.¹²

This brief rehearsal of Alan Culpepper's academic and administrative career reflects only what can be seen above the water line. It is only by exploring what lies beneath the surface that one can begin to appreciate the depths of the man. I had the honor of speaking at Alan's retirement dinner in 2015. I remarked:

Alan has been a wonderful mentor, gracious and generous. He helped me get through my dissertation; then, he helped me get it published. He helped me get my first (and only) teaching post at Baylor. He read my pre-publication manuscripts ... and he has written endorsements for my books. But our relationship has gone far beyond that of academic mentor/apprentice.¹³

I continued: "And I am not alone. For every one of his doctoral students, the time came when each of us was no longer called student, but friend."¹⁴

9 The fall 2015 issue of the Seminary's magazine, *Tableaux*, was devoted to "20 Years as Dean: The Legacy of R. Alan Culpepper." Jacque also served on the School of Education faculty on Mercer's Atlanta campus.

10 Loyd Allen, "Mercer's Theology School: A Memoir of the Early Years," *Tableaux* 10 (2015): 9.

11 *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998); *Mark* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2007); *Eternity as a Sunrise* (see note 1). Edited volumes include: with C. Clifton Black, *Exploring the Gospel of John* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996); *Critical Readings of John 6* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997); with John Painter and Fernando F. Segovia, *Word, Theology, and Community in John* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002); with Paul N. Anderson, *Communities in Dispute: Current Scholarship on the Johannine Epistles* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2014).

12 Thus, it is fitting that this *Festschrift* is published in the series that Alan edited for seventeen years.

13 Mikeal C. Parsons, "Fidelity: A Tribute to R. Alan Culpepper," *Tableaux* 10 (2015): 11.

14 Parsons, "Fidelity," 11.

The adoration of his students is easily demonstrated. A group published a collection of essays in his honor in *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, a journal he once edited.¹⁵ On May 31, 2017, former student Linda Bridges, now President of the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, posted a tribute to Alan on Facebook, entitled, “The Power of a Teacher.” She wrote:

Alan Culpepper builds. He builds words into paragraphs and paragraphs into books. He takes wood and makes bookshelves and decks. He builds boats and tool sheds. He also builds people. He builds learners and imparters of truth from passionate, sometimes arrogant dreamers—me!... [I remember] sitting in his office while he read my Ph.D. with a red pen and gentle spirit. And now years later, I am still sitting, listening, and learning just like the young apprentice who sits at the feet of the master teacher.... Teachers matter. Thank you, Dr. Alan Culpepper. You have changed my life.¹⁶

Such expressions of affection are not limited to former students. Another unsolicited Facebook post appeared on August 1, 2017, by Greg Carey, Professor of New Testament at Lancaster Theological Seminary:

Just read a book review by Alan Culpepper. It was a reminder of the remarkable grace this landmark scholar has always extended to his colleagues, a trait that led to a mutual admiration society with my mentor, Fernando Segovia. Culpepper is reviewing a collection of essays that essentially take insights and initiatives he developed 35 years ago and seek to advance them. Rather than picking at details, he celebrates the contributions.

Probably the most influential Johannine interpreter of his generation, Alan has remained an active researcher but devoted himself to administrative work late in his career. Although I never studied with him formally while we were both at Southern Seminary—you couldn’t get into his classes!—I’ve been greatly influenced not only through his writings but also his students and colleagues. I would not have even applied for grad

15 See *PRSt* 35 (2008) with essays by Edwin Broadhead, Linda Bridges, Craig McMahon, Mikeal Parsons, Steven Sheeley, and Richard Vinson.

16 The post originally appeared on Linked In: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/power-teacher-linda-mckinnish-bridges>.

school had not his influence come to me through his PhD students, some of whom he still supervised after leaving Southern.¹⁷

This collection of essays by colleagues in New Testament, many of whom have been friends of Alan Culpepper for several decades, stands as yet one more witness to the lasting legacy of fidelity—in relationships and scholarship—that R. Alan Culpepper has created and generously bequeathed to us. May his years be long and his tribe legion!

17 The comments on that post are also revealing of the widespread esteem with which Culpepper is held by his colleagues.

Gospel of Matthew



From Isaiah 40:3 to Matthew 3:3—Intertextuality and *Traditionsgeschichte*

M. Eugene Boring

We are all indebted to Alan Culpepper, especially for his pioneering work in broadening and deepening our appreciation of literary criticism and narratology as exegetical tools for interpretation of the Gospels. He has done this work without making synchronic interpretation of the final form of the text an alternative to diachronic historical study of the antecedents of the canonical form. His Matthew commentary¹ often presents the Evangelist as interpreter of Mark and Q, just as his exposition of Matthew's interpretation of the Old Testament ponders the effect of previous interpreters at Qumran and in the LXX. This essay probes one facet of such interpretation, tracing some of the hermeneutical paths of Isa 40:3 from Deutero-Isaiah to Matthew.

1 The Good News in Isa 40:3

קול קורא A voice cries out:
 בַּמִּדְבָּר פָּנוּ דֶּרֶךְ יְהוָה "In the wilderness prepare the way of the
 LORD,
 יִשְׂרוּ בְעֶרְבָה מְסִלָּה לְאֱלֹהֵינוּ make straight in the desert a highway for our
 God."
 (NRSV, here and throughout)

This command is a key element in Deutero-Isaiah's initial oracle Isa 40:1–11. The prophet himself is not addressed directly, but overhears the proclamations and responses in the transcendent world. The divine voice, plural imperative as in the opening נִחְמוּ נִחְמוּ, addresses the assembled heavenly court, as in 1 Kgs 22:13–28; Ps 82:1–8; Job 1 (cf. Zech 1:7–21). Nor is the divine message mediated to the reader through the prophet. The hearer-readers overhear the word of God along with the prophet. The diachronic God → angel → prophet → people

1 To appear as Alan R. Culpepper, *Matthew: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, forthcoming).

is collapsed into the synchronic experience of indirect address that—all the more powerfully—becomes immediate and direct.

The message is good news, unqualified and undiluted, to God's people—to deportees in Babylon or wherever they are exiled, to God's people still huddled in the ruins of Jerusalem, site of destroyed temple and continuing lamentation, unable to feel at home so long as their brothers and sisters are homeless (40:1–2; 41:27). Jerusalem is the recipient of good news (40:2; 52:7), but not a passive beneficiary. The Holy City is swept up into the saving event, transformed into an evangelist who proclaims the glad tidings to others—not only to the cities of Judah, for the call is to God's people who will fulfill their mission to be a light to the nations (40:9; 41:27; 52:7). Zion the proclaimed becomes the proclaimer. Indicative generates imperative. Yahweh's first words, the imperatives of 40:1 and 40:3, are grounded in the indicative of 40:2.

The good news is entirely theocentric. Others are drawn into the saving work of God, but in everything it is God himself who is at work: God delegates, authorizes, commissions, sends. The content of the good news is not ideas about God, but God himself, the very being, reality, presence, power, and acts of God. Even the acts of God through angelic beings and prophet remain the acts of God. In 40:1, God commands the angelic hosts to comfort Israel, but in 51:12, it is God himself who does the comforting. In 40:3, God commands the heavenly beings to prepare a highway through the desert, but in 49:11, Yahweh says, "I will turn all my mountains into a road, and my highways shall be raised up." The prophet preaches, and it is God who speaks. More than forty times, the prophetic *כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה* or similar formulae validate the prophet's words as mediating the voice of God.

The good news has a fundamentally historical dimension, an event-character that happens in time and space, inseparable from the question "What time is it?" in the purpose of God for the world. Accordingly, the good news of God's absolute grace cannot be an alternative to God's justice and judgment. The Creator is God of justice and judgment, but the good news is that in God's plan for history the time of judgment is past, over and done with: Israel has served her term, her penalty is paid (40:2). The opening words include "my people" and "your God" (40:1), evoking and overruling the language of judgment in Hos 1:9–10, "you are not my people and I am not your God." That was then; this is now. That was the time of judgment, when the covenant had been violated from Israel's side. Now, the judgment is past, and the covenant has been restored from God's side.

The good news reinterprets the promise of salvation. Deutero-Isaiah has not given up on the hope of the eschatological fulfillment of God's purpose for

Israel and the world, nor has he abandoned the messianic language, the promise of a Davidic king, in which this hope had sometimes been expressed. He reaffirms and reinterprets this language and imagery in astounding ways no one could have anticipated. The promised anointed king who will be the instrument of God's ultimate purpose will surely come, in fact is already here, but he is not a Davidide. Cyrus the Persian, utterly unaware that he is the agent of God's eschatological purpose who will allow the deportees to return home, is God's anointed: *כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה לְמַשִּׁיחוֹ לְכוּרֶשׁ* (45:1; cf. 41:2, 25; 43:14; 44:28; 45:1–7, 13; 46:11). The promise to David is not abandoned, but reinterpreted in terms of the people as a whole (55:3–5). Ultimately, the promised eschatological glory associated with the coming king is now to be understood in terms of Yahweh himself (52:7). Yahweh is the king who will accomplish his ultimate purpose through his servants, both Israel and Cyrus, but who will not share his glory with another (42:8; 44:23; 48:11), for “the LORD alone will be exalted in that day” (2:11, 17).

The good news is not about the exiles. The breathtaking announcement that their exile is over, that the deportees may go home, is of course the wonderful fulfillment of their hopes and dreams, beside which the *Odyssey* and all homecoming stories pale. But homecoming, the coming of Israel back to their home in the promised land, is the salvific outcome of the coming of God. The path of the exiles back home would be pictured as from the north, along the caravan route of the fertile crescent that necessarily circumvented the desert. This is the route actually taken by returnees such as Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and the groups that accompanied them. This in itself would be good news indeed, but the content of the good news is the coming of God, the Redeemer of Israel who strides directly across the desert, on an imperial highway specially constructed for the ruler of the universe, at the head of a great procession of his own people. Highways were associated with kings, with empires. Normal pedestrian, donkey, and camel traffic and their carts and wagons could and did follow the circuitous footpaths and narrow roads that snaked along river banks and through dry canyons. Empires needed wide and paved highways, all-weather roads for economic and military purposes. Only empires could afford, build, and administer such international highways. Such a highway was a kingdom-thing. The highway was for God, *מִסְלָה לְאֱלֹהֵינוּ ... דֶּרֶךְ יְהוָה*, built by and for God. Only God could build such a highway across the desert. The announcement of such a highway proclaimed the near advent of the kingdom of God. The good news focused in Isa 40:3 is that God the Creator, who has a plan for history in which we humans have been granted a role, is personally *on the way* to bring this plan to its proper fulfillment. The returning exiles celebrate

along with Jerusalem-become-evangelist, with the hills, mountains, and trees, but they do not say, “The deportees are coming home.” They say *הִנֵּה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם*, “Behold your God” (40:9).

Such a homecoming includes the Grand Homecoming for which not only Israel, but all humans long:

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.²

The Evangelist Matthew will take up this hope in his initial citation from Scripture (Matt 1:23 = Isa 7:14) and will reaffirm it in the prophetic words adopted from both his primary sources (Matt 3:3 = Mark 1:3/Q 3:4 = Isa 40:3). Matthew does not begin directly with the Hebrew text of his Bible, but, like the prophet before him,³ Matthew stands within a dynamic stream of continuing reinterpretation.

2 Isaiah 40:3 in Jewish Interpretation

2.1 *Qumran*

The earliest explicit interpretation of Isa 40:3 appears in the biblical manuscripts used by the Qumran community and in their own writings that interpret biblical texts. The earliest extant manuscript containing the Hebrew text of Isa 40:3 is 1QIsa^a, which agrees with the later MT, not only word for word but virtually letter for letter, varying only by the addition of a *v* before *יִשְׁרוּ* and the

2 The lyrics of *Veni, veni Emmanuel* may go back as far as the 12th century; the author is unknown.

3 Isaiah 40–55 is steeped in the language and imagery of earlier texts in the Hebrew Bible, especially the Psalter and prior Isaianic tradition. The brief excerpt Isa 40:3 reveals two clear echoes of earlier tradition with specifically Isaianic features. The image of God as the “Caller” derives from Isa 6:4 (cf. also 21:11), is intensified and repeated in Deutero-Isaiah (40:3; 41:4; 43:7; 45:3; 46:11; 48:12–13), but rarely found elsewhere. So also, the *מְדַבֵּר מִדְּבָר* appropriates the exodus imagery to portray the return of the exiles from Babylon (40:2; 42:16–17; 43:16–21, 28; 48:20–21; 49:9–10; 51:9–52:3; 52:11–12; 55:12–13). This is not only the adoption of familiar and widespread biblical pictures for the paradigmatic saving act of God, but parallels specific imagery found elsewhere in canonical Isaiah that depicts a royal highway for bringing the exiles home and the consummation of God’s purpose to unite the nations with Israel in the worship of the one God (11:15–16; 19:23–24; 35:1–8).

full holēm in לֹא־לוֹהֵינוּ. Likewise, the fragments 1QIsa^b, 4Q176 fl-2i6, 4Q259 3-5, and 4Q259 3.19 agree exactly with the MT except for minor orthographical differences, as do the citations of Isa 40:3 in the community's own interpretative writings (1QS 8.14; 9.19–20).

While theoretically the unpointed and unaccented consonantal text could be construed such that it is the voice, and not the highway, that is in the desert (see on the LXX below), the context in Isaiah 40–55 makes it clear that the voice sounds forth from the heavenly court, and the highway is to be built in the desert.⁴ The later Masoretes confirmed this centuries-old tradition, understanding the context, rhythm, and parallelism of Isa 40:3 to mean that it is the way, not the voice, that is located in the wilderness, and they indicated this by their accentuation, the zāqēp qāṭōn over קוֹלֵא separating קוֹלֵא from בְּמִדְבָּר פָּנּוּ דֶרֶךְ יְהוָה.

It is clear that this is the way the Qumran community read the text, even though they believed that the contemporary voice of the LORD continued to sound forth to them in their wilderness hermitage. They could hear the words of the מוֹרֵה הַצֶּדֶק (the Teacher of Righteousness, 1QpHab 113) as the revealed Word of God. But God's word came to him and them primarily through Scripture; it was the Teacher's role as interpreter of Scripture in which he functioned as spokesperson for God. The voice calling was the voice of God. It is addressed through the Scripture not to angelic beings, but to the Teacher and his disciples/adherents. The command was not to build a highway through the eastern desert, but to prepare the way for the coming of God by careful interpretation and observance of the Torah (1QS 8.11–14). They expected the appearance of two Messiahs and a final Prophet, a final battle in which they would participate; then Yahweh would once more be present in the temple, which would be purified from its present defiled state. In the meantime, they themselves represented the temple, and there was an already/not yet sense in which the coming God was already present among them.

Unlike Deutero-Isaiah and his hearers, the Qumran covenanters are not transported with the prophet to the heavenly throne room, though they believe in the reality of the heavenly world in which their own worship participates in that of the angels. Yet they do not hear "Prepare the way of the Lord"

4 Isaiah 40–55 has much about a way through the wilderness (41:18–19; 42:11; 43:19–20; 51:3), nothing about a voice calling in the wilderness. Furthermore, the only other instance in Deutero-Isaiah of קוֹל followed immediately by a matching verbal Qal participle, the קוֹל אִמֵּר of 40:6, likewise introduces a direct quotation. Except for the אַכְיָן, all English translations after the 17th century known to me connect בְּמִדְבָּר to the way, not the voice, as do all the recent translations in French, German, and Spanish known to me.

as spoken in the heavenly court to the assembled angels, but as addressed to themselves, the community of the New Covenant they believed themselves to be. In their own time and place, as the vanguard of God's eschatological saving act, they heard the קול קורא through the Scripture as interpreted by their Teacher. They do not understand the biblical text to be a prediction that is fulfilled in their own times, but as immediate address. "Prepare the way" was more imperative than indicative, more *Aufgabe* than *Gabe*, a holy task they themselves were called to fulfill by disciplined study and observance of the Torah. They do not hear themselves called to scan the eastern horizon where God and the angels are preparing the way through the desert from Babylon to Jerusalem, with God at the head of a procession of returning exiles, a visionary scene that evokes jubilation from Jerusalem, the exiles, the nations, and the world of nature. They hear themselves called to an austere life of study and discipline, as a community (קהל = ἐκκλησία) charged to prepare the way for the coming of God, God's act of eschatological salvation effected and made real by the presence of God himself. Isaiah 40:3 thus played a key role in the self-understanding of the Qumran community, a function dependent on construing and interpreting an inherently ambiguous text in a particular way. A different option was taken by the translators of the LXX, roughly contemporary with the interpretation of the Qumran community.

2.2 The Septuagint

There are no significant textual problems in the transmission of Isa 40:3; the Göttingen *Septuaginta* agrees letter for letter with the common printed edition of Rahlfs:

φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ·
 ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου,
 εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν.⁵

Nor is there any indication that the translator(s) of the LXX had a Hebrew *Vorlage* that differed in any respect from the consonantal text preserved at Qumran and in the MT. Yet this brief text presents the translator with more than one possibility. While the vocable קרא can be read either as Qal perfect third masculine singular "he/it calls" (which would more likely be taken to place the way, not the voice, in the wilderness), or as the Qal masculine

5 Joseph Ziegler, *Isaias*, Septuaginta (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1939), 266–67; Alfred Rahlfs and Robert Hanhart, eds., *Septuaginta: Id Est Vetus Testamentum Graece Iuxta Lxx Interpretes*, 2 vols. in 1 vol. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 2:619.

singular participle, all extant texts include the *mater* (קורא). The LXX translator must thus translate it as a participle. However, the vocable קול, with or without the ך, can be read as either absolute or construct. Both the Qumran texts and the Masoretes read it as absolute. If taken as absolute, the phrase קול קורא would be translated φωνή βοῶσα, but would normally mean “a crying voice,” not “a voice cries.” The participle is not normally used in Hellenistic Greek as the equivalent of the finite verb, as in Hebrew.⁶ Had the LXX translator read the Hebrew text as meaning “a voice cries,” the expected translation would be φωνή βοᾷ (the present active indicative third singular of βοάω is not found in the LXX or NT, but cf. SibOr 3,212). That the LXX translator understands קול to be in the construct is made certain by the masculine genitive participle βοῶντος, which cannot be an adjectival relation modifying the feminine noun φωνή. The Greek phrase must then be translated “the voice of one crying.” When so construed, the apparent Hebrew syntax is no longer obvious, and the most natural (but not necessary) reading of the Greek is “a voice of one crying in the wilderness.”⁷ The truism that every translation is an interpretation applies here. The LXX was the Bible of the early church. Except for the minimal extent to which early Christian interpreters were interested in, and capable of, interpreting the Hebrew text for themselves, this means that the New Testament interpretations are interpretations of interpretations. Though in the case of Isa 40:3 we do not know whom the LXX translator might have had in mind as “the voice in the wilderness,”⁸ we do know that this translation

6 See Friedrich Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 242–46.

7 Joel Marcus points out that it is only the absence of the “in the wilderness/in the desert parallelism” in the LXX that enables the voice to be located in the wilderness, and that “later rabbinic traditions do frequently connect ‘in the wilderness’ with the crying voice,” citing Strack-Billerbeck 1:96–97 (Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 15 n. 9).

8 “The translator of Isaiah took the role of an interpreter of prophecy, updating and contextualizing it in places to show that the prophecies applied to his own generation.” Karen H. Jobes, ed., *Discovering the Septuagint: A Guided Reader* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2016), 301. For thorough, nuanced documentation, see J. Ross Wagner, *Reading the Sealed Book: Old Greek Isaiah and the Problem of Septuagint Hermeneutics*, FAT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013). David Moessner makes a cogent case that “In the LXX the ‘voice,’ the ‘preacher of good tidings,’ and the ‘servant’ are identified as one figure. Moreover, this servant-voice-preacher of good news leads the ‘new exodus’ of the final salvation in which his presence brings the very kingly presence of the Lord himself to Jerusalem (52:6–7)!” David P. Moessner, *Lord of the Banquet: The Literary and Theological Significance of the Lukan Travel Narrative* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 242 n. 215.

facilitated the early Christian appropriation of this text. Read in the light of the Christ event, the earliest Christian teachers knew to whom the text referred. We now turn to their interpretations.

3 Isaiah 40:3 in Early Christianity

The earliest extant Christian text to cite or allude to Isa 40:3 is Mark 1:3, where it is combined with another citation, itself an amalgam of Exod 23:20 and Mal 3:1. Except for the parallels in Matt 3:3 and Luke 3:4, this is the only instance of Isa 40:3 in the New Testament. It seems unlikely that Mark himself searched through his Bible, selected these three texts, and made all the editorial and compositional decisions that resulted in this somewhat awkward *mélange*. The pre-history of the Markan form might illuminate the meaning of the final form of the text. The following sketch outlines my own view of the most probable history:

1. Prior to the composition of the Gospel of Mark, someone combined Exod 23:20 and Mal 3:1. Though first documented in post-New Testament rabbinic texts (*Seder 6ia* read in combination with Mal 3:1–8, 23–24; *Exod. Rab.* 32.9, *Deut. Rab.* 11.9), the practice of conflating texts was common already at Qumran, and this combination may be pre-Christian.
2. This composite text was understood to refer to John the Baptist.
3. This composite text was inserted into Q as part of Jesus' praise of John (Q 7:27), prefaced by *ἐγγράπται*. (1.–3., of course, could all have been simultaneous, the work of the composer[s] of Q.)
4. Prior to the composition of the Gospel of Mark, someone interpreted Isa 40:3 in reference to the appearance of John the Baptist.
5. This interpretation, along with the citation of Isa 40:3, was embedded in the narrative of John's initial appearance, preaching, and baptism of Jesus.
6. This narrative, including the citation of Isa 40:3, became the opening scene of Q. (4.–6., of course, could all have been simultaneous, the work of the composer[s] of Q.)
7. Mark finds Isa 40:3 in the opening of Q⁹ and the Exod 23:20/Mal 3:1 combination as the closing bracket of Q's section spanned by the beginning and

9 Among Q scholars, the two primary disputed points of this complex and disputed history are whether Isa 40:3 was cited in Q and whether Mark knew Q, with the majority casting a negative vote on both issues. A full discussion, with bibliography, is given in Frans Neirynck, "The First Synoptic Pericope: The Appearance of John the Baptist in Q?," in *Evangelica III*:

end of John's ministry (Q 3:4; 7:27). He combines the two quotations under the heading of "Isaiah the prophet" and introduces the whole with the γέγραπται formula.

8. Matthew utilizes both Mark and Q in his composition of the opening scene Matt 3:1–17, but he follows Q in placing the Isaiah citation in the opening Q bracket and the Exodus/Malachi citation in the closing bracket.

3.1 *Isaiah 40:3 in Q: The Jesus Story Begins with John, but Priority Belongs to Jesus*

3.1.1 John is the Beginning

Q is a structured narrative¹⁰ that begins with John the Baptist. The two principle and lengthiest scenes deal with John, forming an inclusio (3:2 ... 22 // 7:18–28). Each of these scenes pictures John in the wilderness, preparing the way, identifying John as the one of whom scripture speaks, introduced by the γέγραπται formula (3:4 // 7:24, 27).

1992–2000 *Collected Essays*, ed. Frans Neirynck, BETL (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), 209–44. Among the substantial number of scholars who include the citation in Q are Arland D. Jacobson, *The First Gospel: An Introduction to Q* (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge, 1992), 80; Ivan Havener, *Q: The Sayings of Jesus. With a Reconstruction of Q by Athanasius Polag* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1987), 28; Migaku Sato, *Q und Prophetie* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1988), 18–20 (with caution); David R. Catchpole, *The Quest for Q* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 60–78, who also argues Mark 1:1–8 used Q; In addition to the commentaries, see Jan Lambrecht, "John the Baptist and Jesus in Mark 1.1–15: Markan Redaction of Q?," *NTS* 38 (1992), 357–84; Ismo Dunderberg, "Q and the Beginning of Mark," *NTS* 41 (1995), 501–511; Harry T. Fleddermann, *Mark and Q: A Study of the Overlap Texts* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 9–13, 501–11, and the bibliography they provide. Unfortunately, the *Documenta Q* series (Leuven: Peeters, 13 vols. 1996–2014) that traces the whole debate on pro and con arguments for the reconstruction of every detail of every unit of Q is not yet available for either Q 3:4 or Q 7:27.

In my previous work on Q, Mark, and Matthew, I have assumed with the majority of scholars that the citation of Isa 40:3 was not part of Q's opening scene. Research for this essay has forced me to reexamine the issue, and, it now seems to me that the most probable reconstruction of the beginning of Q included this citation.

- 10 Q is mainly a collection of sayings, but they are placed in a narrative framework (cf. John S. Kloppenborg, "City and Wasteland: Narrative World and the Beginning of the Sayings Gospel (Q)," *Semeia* 52 [1990], 145–60). Q not only projects a narrative world but includes narrative scenes (Q 3:2–4, 7–9, 16–17, 21–22; 4:1–13; 7:1–10, 18–28; 9:57–60; 10:25–27; 11:1–4; 11:14–26). Q is not yet the kind of narrative represented by the Gospels, but neither is it only a collection of sayings with no apparent structure, like the *Gospel of Thomas*, with its 114 sayings all introduced by "Jesus said/says."

All canonical Gospels preface the narrative of Jesus' ministry with a section about John (cf. also the matter-of-fact comment at Acts 1:22; 10:37) but do not do this independently. It was Q that initiated this tradition that shapes all the Gospels. Except for Mark, Matthew, Luke-Acts, and John, none of the other New Testament documents so much as mention John. Q thus plays an important role in understanding the respective roles of John and Jesus in the formation of early Christian theology. It is important to remember that, historically, some of John's followers, including Jesus of Nazareth, came to believe in John as an authentic messenger from God, the last prophet before the imminent final judgment, and were baptized by him. However, this first extant incorporation of John into the Christian gospel was not merely a matter of apologetics, nor (only) a defense against the competing Baptist community who continue as a group parallel to Jesus' own disciples. The community of Jesus' disciples could appear as an offshoot, even a deviant branch, of the original group of John's disciples. When Jesus separated from John and called his own disciples, he and they continued to honor John as a true prophet. Q begins with John without reluctance or the pressure of external events, but as an affirmation of John.

Q begins with John on the narrative stage; he preaches, baptizes and makes disciples (Q 7:18). John certainly had the historical and chronological priority, but Q, after rehearsing the story of Jesus' preaching and healing ministry, at a decisive point has Jesus himself declare, on the basis of scripture, that John is the greatest of prophets. John is even more than a prophet—but the least in the kingdom of God is greater than John (Q 7:28). God had sent John ahead to prepare the way for Jesus himself (Q 7:18–28). This has the effect of treating John not as a competitor who must be ignored, rejected, or explained away, but as one who is incorporated into a *Heilsgeschichte* of which Jesus is the defining center. It is Jesus who will stand with God as the Son of Man at the imminent final judgment.

3.1.2 The Priority Belongs to Jesus

The citation of Isa 40:3 in the opening scene of Q is of crucial significance for Q's understanding the respective roles of John and Jesus in salvation history. The whole matter appears in a different light when the narrator announces from the beginning, on the basis of scripture, that John had proclaimed the near advent of the κύριος, now understood not as the coming of יהוה in judgment but as the appearance of the Lord Jesus in history. This interpretation, and its placement as the opening words of Q, was not made casually. Q has changed the LXX's θεοῦ ἡμῶν to αὐτοῦ to facilitate and express this interpretation. To be

sure, John still appears first on the narrative stage, but the John who appears is the messenger of the transcendent Lord who precedes him in time and is above him in rank.

Κύριος appears in Q (1) as a designation of God, the LXX translation of יהוה (4:8, 12; 10:2, 21 [in Jesus' prayer!]; 13:35), (2) in the conventional social sense of a master of slaves or title of respect for government officials, religious dignitaries, and revered teachers (12:42–46; 13:25, 26, 14:21; 16:13; 19:15–20), and (3), when applied to Jesus, in a more exalted sense than the conventional social usage (cf. e.g., 6:46; 7:6–7; 9:59; 12:43; 13:25–26; 19:15–20). This initial reference to Jesus as κύριος sets the tone for understanding the connotation of the word when applied to Jesus elsewhere in Q. Jesus is identified with the heavenly κύριος of Isa 40:3, but this does not mean that Q had a conceptualized doctrine of “preexistence,” “incarnation,” or the “deity of Christ.” Such instances of identifying the Christian Messiah with biblical texts and imagery had not yet been raised to the level of theological reflection, but nonetheless this casting of Jesus in the role of the κύριος spoken of in Isa 40:3 has momentous implications for the implicit Christology of Q and for later developments in the New Testament and the formation of Christian dogma. This line of thought has the effect of making an end run around the presumed priority of John the Baptist to Jesus. John preceded Jesus on the historical stage, but Jesus is identified as the Lord spoken of by Isaiah. The citation in Q 3:4 is thus somewhat analogous to Mark's christological argument in Mark 12:35–37 in reference to the respective roles of the Christ and David.

There is no reflection in Q on this momentous move, but when the Q group narrates the life of the earthly Jesus as identified with the transcendent Lord, the fundamental raw materials are already present for the later church's explicit and conscious use of God-language for Jesus (e.g., John 1:1, 18; 20:28; Ign. *Eph.* 1.0 and often). The Q narrator tells the reader this up front, though no one in the narrative hears this initial citation of Isa 40:3. In the Q narrative, John himself may not have known the identity of the κύριος whose near advent he proclaims. But the Q group knows.

3.2 *Isaiah 40:3 in Mark 1:2*

I picture Mark's relation to Q as follows: Mark is aware of Q, knows it well, affirms some of it as preserving some sayings of the Lord and as a valid witness to the meaning of the Christ-event. He does not, however, use it as a “source” in the same way that Matthew and Luke use Mark and Q as sources. He is suspicious of Q as a genre of didactic and prophetic material not grounded in the story of Jesus' way to the cross, a genre that is too open to continued

expansion by the addition of purported sayings of Jesus, particularly the oracles of Christian prophets.¹¹ This by no means precludes Mark's incorporating Q texts he considers important; hence the Mark/Q overlaps.

Mark has been positively influenced by the beginning of Q,¹² and adopts and adapts much of it as the introduction to his Gospel. He composed 1:1 as the title for the whole Gospel, so phrased that it flows seamlessly into the transcendent scene of 1:2–3, the prelude and transition to the Gospel narrative proper that begins with the appearance of John at 1:4. From Q's second section about John the Baptist, Mark extracts only the biblical citation introduced by γέγραπται and inserts it into the Isaiah citation with which Q begins. The result is a characteristic Markan intercalation:¹³

- A Καθὼς γέγραπται
 ἐν τῷ Ἡσαΐα τῷ προφήτῃ· (Isaiah)
 B ἰδοὺ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου (Exodus 23:20),
 ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου (Mal 3:1)
 A φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ·
 ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου, εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους αὐτοῦ (Isa 40:3).

Mark has thus adopted Q's opening identification of Jesus as the transcendent κύριος and strengthened and clarified it with the second quotation. The LXX cited in Q 7:27 had already made the identification of the figures in the transcendent scene more clear by translating the Hebrew text of Mal 3:1

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- 11 An earlier, detailed argument for this hypothesis is found in M. Eugene Boring, "The Paucity of Sayings in Mark: A Hypothesis," in *SBL Seminar Papers 1977* (Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1977), 371–78.
- 12 If one is not convinced of the existence of Q, that Q included Isa 40:3 in its opening lines, or that Mark knew Q, the preceding discussion of the theological creativity of Q's opening paragraph must be attributed to Mark himself. In my 2006 commentary, I argued that Mark knew Q, but was not yet convinced that Q cited Isa 40:3 (see M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, NTL [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006]).
- 13 The alternative is that Mark and Q independently came across the Exod 23:20/Mal 3:1 combination, independently applied it to John, that Q used it in the closing bracket and Mark used it in his opening paragraph, and that Matthew and Luke independently ignored it in Mark and retained it in Q. The scenario argued here seems to make more historical, compositional, and theological sense. I owe the suggestion that the structure represents a typical Markan sandwich to Rikki Watts, who wryly comments that "the technique is not altogether unknown in his work" (Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark*, WUNT 88 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2000], 57).

(וּפְנֵה-דֶרֶךְ לְפָנַי) as κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου, from “prepare my way” to “prepare your way.” In Isaiah, the audience had overheard, along with the prophet, the voice of God in the transcendent world commanding the heavenly court. This was obscured in Q by inserting both biblical quotations into their respective narrative contexts about John, expressing the concern to identify John as true prophet of God, but subordinate to Jesus. Mark restores the original communicative gestalt of Isaiah 40 by combining the two quotations, placing Q 7:27 first, attributing them both to Isaiah, and presenting them as the offstage voice of God directly to the hearer-readers before the plotted narrative begins. In Mark, it is thus all the more clear that God speaks *to* the transcendent Lord (Jesus) *about* the messenger¹⁴ (John), who will prepare *your* (Jesus’) way. Before the appearance of either John or Jesus on the historical stage, Mark’s hearer-readers know the identity of both, and that John’s role is to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus.

The rudiments of this “messianic secret” had been dimly present in Q, but no need was felt to develop it in any consistent manner. In Q, John is the messenger of the transcendent Lord Jesus but is not aware of this when he baptizes Jesus. That Jesus himself might be the “one to come” only begins to dawn on him later, when he hears of Jesus’ messianic works, and Jesus publicly confirms this dawning faith (Q 7:18–28). The composer(s) of Q of course knew that the Lord had appeared in history as Jesus of Nazareth who was filled with divine miracle-working power (including raising the dead, 7:22), that he had been killed and would reappear as the Son of Man at the parousia, but there is no passion story, no resurrection account, and no explicit affirmation of the soteriological significance of Jesus’ death and resurrection in Q. There was no concern about how to combine a truly divine, miracle-working Lord Jesus with a truly human suffering and death. Mark is concerned about preserving both modes of confessing faith in God’s saving act in Jesus and extends Q’s rudimentary narrative framework into the new literary genre, for which the messianic secret was “the hermeneutical presupposition of the genre, ‘gospel!’”¹⁵ Thus, while it is theologically unproblematic for Q to portray Jesus as having been recognized and confessed as κύριος during his earthly life, for Mark the κύριος title is reserved for deity, and never used unambiguously of the pre-Easter Jesus.¹⁶

14 The Q understanding is facilitated by the LXX ἄγγελος, there understood as the divine messenger from the heavenly world, here as the human messenger John.

15 Hans Conzelmann, “Present and Future in the Synoptic Tradition,” *JTC* 5 (1968), 43.

16 Κύριος is found sixteen times in Mark, primarily of God (11:9; 12:9, 11, 12:29–30; 13:20) or the transcendent Lord Jesus (1:3; 12:36–37; 13:35), but only three times of the human Jesus,

Mark thus begins with a complex doubled citation of “Isaiah,” each part taken from Q, each part portraying the transcendent Lord as having a ὁδός, a way he calls his disciples to walk, but it is not an ideal or set of ethical principles commended or commanded by the Lord from heaven. Nor is it the joyful, triumphal march of the Lord from Babylon to Zion at the head of his redeemed people set free from exile and returning home. This picture has not been rejected or postponed but reinterpreted in the light of the historical destiny of the Lord Jesus, who calls his disciples to walk the same road he walked, the way that leads to the cross.¹⁷

3.3 *Isaiah 40:3 in Matthew 3:3*

Both Matthew and the texts with which he works already stand in a rich and multilayered tradition. Matthew interprets not only his Bible, but the interpretations of his Bible already found in his community and in its Christian texts. He finds Isa 40:3 in the opening words of each of his major sources, where they agree verbatim with the LXX and each other. This means that when Matthew ponders the meaning of Isa 40:3, he sees not only the identical LXX text used by Q and Mark, but a text already embedded in more than one stream of Christian interpretation. He cites Isa 40:3 exactly as found in Mark and Q, preserving their changes from the LXX and MT. He adopts and adapts hermeneutical elements from both Q and Mark, not by editorial modifications of the citation itself, or by commentary on it, but by the contextualization that is inherent in his overall redactional strategy.

Matthew interprets Q interpreting Isaiah. A thumbnail sketch of the formation of the Gospel of Matthew:¹⁸ Around the middle of the first century CE, Matthew’s community was founded by missionaries of the Q community in southern Syria. Q became for this community formative sacred tradition, used

always with intentional ambiguity such that the reader, but not the characters in the story, recognize his true identity (2:28; 5:19; 11:3 [7:28?]).

17 Of the sixteen occurrences of ὁδός in Mark, fourteen have more than the literal sense, with overtones of Isaiah’s highway through the desert (1:2, 3; 2:23; 4:4, 15; 6:8; 8:3, 27; 9:33, 34; 10:17, 32, 46, 52; 11:8; 12:14). See especially Marcus, *Way of the Lord* and Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark*.

18 Among the variety of options, I find most persuasive the general sequence argued by Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 41–51 and passim, and the literature he gives. For my own brief elaboration of this scenario, see M. Eugene Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 8:94–102. For a dissenting view, see J. Andrew Doole, *What Was Mark for Matthew?: An Examination of Matthew’s Relationship and Attitude to His Primary Source*, WUNT 2/344 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 175–94 and passim.

regularly in worship and instruction for perhaps a decade or more. Sometime after 70 CE, Matthew's church welcomed another group of Christians, perhaps displaced by the war against the Romans, who brought with them the Gospel of Mark. Matthew and his fellow teachers adopted the new genre of Christian instruction as their framework for preaching and teaching the Jesus story, incorporating Q into this structure, in this sense subordinating Q to Mark. Matthew and his community valued both texts, knew them both very well, but, where they overlapped or had conflicting perspectives, they often preferred the Q version. In 10:10, for instance, he adopts the older and more rigorous Q version of instructions for Christian missionaries rather than Mark's adaptation in Mark 6:8–9.

Where Q and Mark differ in their use of Isa 40:3, Matthew mainly follows Q. The heavenly voice of Isaiah's oracle is incorporated within the narrative as the narrator's voice identifying John the Baptist. Although Mark had offered a different option, Matthew follows Q. The identification of John as the "voice in the wilderness" now means that the *κύριος* is not the "you" addressed by God in the transcendent world, but the earthly Jesus.

Whereas Q's interpretation set the stage for a presentation of the life and message of Jesus in the framework of a rudimentary version of the messianic secret, which Mark developed into a fundamental and consistent feature of his Gospel, Matthew either misses this point, ignores it, or intentionally rejects it. Mark's messianic secret had made it possible to narrate the story of Jesus, Messiah and Son of God, without compromising either his divinity as transcendent Lord or his suffering and death as a truly human being. Matthew preserves Mark's paradoxical narrative Christology, apparently without realizing the literary-theological role played by the messianic secret. He sees no need of it, if he sees it at all, preserving some of its elements in his Markan source but "correcting" the Markan secrecy motif when it is at cross purposes with his own perspective. Thus, for instance, while for Mark it was necessary that the story be told in such a way that neither the disciples nor anyone else grasp Jesus' true identity until the story is over, Matthew's conviction that Jesus is the supreme teacher who generates understanding disciples (13:51; 23:8) omits or changes every instance in which the Markan disciples fail to understand or misunderstand Jesus' words and works. This means that when the audience hears Isa 40:3's "Prepare the way of the Lord" in Matthew 3:3, it is no longer the startling word from the transcendent world identifying Jesus as divine Lord, but, in step with Matthew's other scriptural citations, the prediction of the biblical prophet of John the Baptist who will prepare people for Jesus. The audience knows that not only Mary and Joseph, but also the magi and Herod, already know the identity of Jesus and is not surprised that John recognizes

him before he is baptized (1:18–21; 2:1–12; 3:13–15). Thus, in contrast to Mark but in line with Q, Matthew does not hesitate to have Jesus addressed as κύριος as equivalent to or with the overtones of Χριστός or deity (thirty-three times). Likewise, though Mark had made ἡ ὁδὸς κυρίου a leitmotif of his narrative—the way of Jesus to the cross, which disciples are called to follow, Matthew, despite his focus on discipleship and doing the will of God, seems oblivious to this Markan theme. It is not *following* Jesus ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ (Mark 10:52), but hearing and understanding his ethical discourses incorporated from Q, that is the Matthean mode of ethical instruction.

Matthew is also influenced by Mark's interpretation of Isa 40:3. While Mark's fundamental influence on Matthew's interpretation was in supplying the gospel genre within which Matthew could interpret his other traditions, it is also likely that Mark's specific interpretation of Isa 40:3 had a significant impact on Matthew's hermeneutic.

As in Mark, Matthew's first explicit quotation is from Isaiah; the good news from and about Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise made through Isaiah. For Matthew, as for Mark, the advent of Jesus is the manifestation of the very presence of the divine Lord, identified as Jesus of Nazareth. Matthew understands Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah's promise of the coming king to be born of the παρθένης (Isa 7:14/Matt 1:23). While Matthew presumably assumes the story of the virginal conception and birth of Jesus is literal truth, the point of this opening prophetic word is not biology but theology: the coming one, born in this world of a human mother and himself human, will be constituted by God as Ἐμμανουήλ, אֱמָנוּאֵל, *God with us*.¹⁹ Prompted by Mark's provocative opening, Matthew too finds an Isaiah text with which to begin his own narrative, a text that explicitly presents the birth of Jesus as the fulfillment of the promise of the coming of God. This was the good news of Isa 40:3. The long series of reinterpretations that lead to Matt 3:3 is not a dilution. To be sure, the κύριος is not the יהוה of Isaiah (at least not directly so), the φωνή is the voice of John, not the voice of God (at least not directly so), the ἔρημος is no longer the site of the divine highway but the locale of John's preaching, and the ὁδὸς is neither God's path through the desert nor Jesus' way to the cross. But Matthew, too, sees the Christ event as the coming of God to be present with his people, to redeem them from their scattered, displaced exile, and to bring them home, the advent of Emmanuel, as God had promised through the prophet Isaiah.

19 This theme is woven into Matthew's core theology, from beginning to end. See 1:23; 10:40; 13:37; 16:18; 18:5, 20; 25:40, and the concluding 28:20, where Jesus represents the continuing presence of God through history, not only in the church but in the world at large.

Turning the Other Cheek to a Perpetrator: Renunciation or Upholding of Justice?

Lidija Novakovic

In his recent article on the fulfilment of Scripture in Matthew, Alan Culpepper emphasizes that the antitheses in Matt 5:21–48 “challenge the reader to understand how supplanting the scriptural commands with Jesus’ teaching can be understood as fulfilment and not abolition” of the Mosaic law.¹ I wish to honor Culpepper’s legacy in Gospel studies by exploring the structure and function of the fifth antithesis (Matt 5:38–42) in order to show that Jesus’ teaching about nonresistance does not abolish but upholds the *lex talionis* as the legal basis for just relationships regulated by the Mosaic law.

The traditional designation “antitheses” for the six textual units in Matt 5:21–48 is somewhat misleading because Jesus’ interpretations of individual pieces of Mosaic legislation are, according to Matt 5:17, not meant to contradict the Torah but to exemplify the “surpassing righteousness” that Jesus’ followers are called to adopt (Matt 5:20). Matthew’s stated objective, however, is not easy to demonstrate. Matthew 5:38–42 is even more challenging than the other so-called antitheses because the illustrations that follow the formula “You have heard that it was said ... But I say to you ...” seem to suggest further victimization of the injured party. In fact, some interpreters believe that in this passage Jesus either abolishes or bypasses the law and its concern for justice. For example, John P. Meier claims that this antithesis is “the clearest and least disputable case of annulment in the antitheses.”² Robert A. Guelich alleges that “the fifth Antithesis strikes at the very basis of legal justice. The Law’s explicit basis for such justice, the *lex talionis*, stands over against Jesus’ demand of not seeking legal vindication from the evil one in court. In other words, the implications of this Antithesis, like the third (5:31–32), set aside

1 R. Alan Culpepper, “Fulfilment of Scripture and Jesus’ Teaching in Matthew,” *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 49/2 (2015): 1–8, quotation from 4.

2 John P. Meier, *Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel: A Redactional Study of Mt. 5:17–48* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976), 157.

rather than supersede the Old Testament Law.”³ Richard B. Hays argues that in Matt 5:38–42 “Jesus actually overrules the Torah (despite 5:17–18).”⁴ Even when scholars declare that Jesus does not invalidate but fulfills the intention of the Mosaic law, they usually find the solution in the restrictive function of the *lex talionis*: the *lex* delimits retribution to the extent of damage suffered by a victim, and Jesus radicalizes that restriction into a principle of non-retaliation. This interpretation, however, bypasses the question about the *lex talionis* as a guarantor of proportionality and fairness. When Jesus asks his followers not to resist evildoers, is he not asking them to give up hope of a fair recompense for the losses they suffer? Doesn’t his teaching lead to situations in which the perpetrators go unpunished and the victims are repeatedly abused?

One could respond to these disconcerting questions either by situating Jesus’ teaching within the larger framework of his ethics, which upholds fairness in mutual relationships, or by pointing to eschatological recompense, which will finally put all things right. These ideas are especially prominent in Matthew’s Gospel, which frequently emphasizes the principle of reciprocity. According to Matt 7:1–2, people will be judged with the judgment they pronounce and will get the measure they give. Jesus rebukes one of his disciples, saying that “all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matt 26:52). Matt 10:32–33 reaffirms the talionic type of divine justice: Jesus promises not only to acknowledge before his Father those who publicly acknowledge him but also to deny those who publicly deny him. Likewise, Jesus declares that the heavenly Father will forgive the trespasses of those who forgive others and deny forgiveness to those who do not forgive (Matt 6:14–15).

It is, however, much more difficult to find such resources in Matt 5:38–42. In this essay, I take up this challenge, seeking to demonstrate that Jesus’ teaching in this passage does not neglect but upholds the quest for proportional justice. I propose that the interpretive key of the text lies in a specific rhetorical situation addressed by the Matthean narrative. The question of justice is in Matthew’s Gospel considered from the standpoint of the victims within the context of asymmetrical power relationships. In situations when there are no external guarantees of just relationships, the willingness of the injured party to suffer further wrongs provides the conditions—though not the assurances—for a restoration of justice.

3 Robert A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, TX.: Word Books, 1982), 224.

4 Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 324.

The Deuteronomic Version of the Talionic Principle

Although older versions of the *lex talionis* appear in Exod 21:22–25 (a case of serious injury caused by violence) and Lev 24:17–21 (murder and various bodily damages), most interpreters agree that the Matthean Jesus refers to its Deuteronomic version (Deut 19:15–21) that delineates the proper procedure to be followed when one person testifies falsely against another.⁵ Since in such a situation one account is set up against another, it is difficult to discern the truthfulness of the accusation. The priests and the judges, as the representatives of the community, are advised not to accept a charge unless there are two or three witnesses who will support it. After clarifying this general principle, the passage focuses on a specific case in which one person accuses another of a wrongdoing, but in the course of the investigation, presumably by bringing in other witnesses, it becomes clear that this accusation is false. The false witness, who has tried to commit a crime through the legal system by accusing an innocent person, should be punished in the same manner and degree as he intended to do to another. Within this context, the *lex talionis* is invoked: ψυχὴν ἀντὶ ψυχῆς (“life for life”), ὀφθαλμὸν ἀντὶ ὀφθαλμοῦ (“eye for eye”), ὀδόντα ἀντὶ ὀδόντος (“tooth for tooth”) (LXX Deut 19:21b). Its purpose, as a fear factor, is to discourage any similar deeds in the future. In this text, the execution of the *lex talionis* is not optional. The evildoer must be removed from the community (Deut 19:19) and the judges must not show pity (Deut 19:21a). Only the punishment that fits the offense can discourage similar deeds in the future and promote order and security of expectations.⁶

The situation envisioned in this text has two peculiar features. First, the intended injury was never inflicted but was only attempted. Thus, the punishment does not really match the offense but exceeds it. As a principle of proportional retribution that covers a wide range of offenses—from murder to lesser crimes—the *lex talionis* defies here its own purpose. Even if there is no actual loss of life of the victim, the life of the accuser shall be taken.⁷ The

5 The most obvious verbal links between the LXX and the Matthean text are: the verb ἀντίστημι (“stand against”) in Deut 19:18 and Matt 5:39a; the substantival adjective ὁ πονηρός (“the evil one”) in Deut 19:19 and Matt 5:39a; and the second and third elements of the talionic formula, ὀφθαλμὸν ἀντὶ ὀφθαλμοῦ [καὶ] ὀδόντα ἀντὶ ὀδόντος (“eye for eye [and] tooth for tooth”), in Deut 19:21 and Matt 5:38.

6 Michael Welker, “Security of Expectations: Reformulating the Theology of Law and Gospel,” *JR* 66 (1986): 240–54.

7 David Daube was not able to discover the idea of compensation in the Deuteronomic version of the *lex talionis*: “It may well have appeared to the author of the Deuteronomic formula that to speak of compensation in this case was somewhat illogical, since as the accused

authorities “shall do to the false witness just as the false witness had meant to do to the other” (Deut 19:19). The *lex talionis* functions here as a punitive and preventive measure—as a warning to the community not only to act justly but also to speak truthfully. Second, the primary role of the judges is to determine the truth. The text presumes their impartiality and integrity. If they fail to accomplish this task, an innocent person could be punished and the offender unjustly exonerated. In this scenario, an unjust act will not only remain unaddressed but additional injustice will be committed. If the legal system does not work properly, it becomes a vehicle for further injustices. Thus, a proper discernment of the character of the deed of which a person is accused functions as the basic presupposition for the execution of justice.

A rewritten form of the Deuteronomic version of the *lex talionis* in the *Temple Scroll* (11Q19 61.6–12)⁸ comprises all the essential elements that appear in its base text. If the judges, priests, and Levites, after conducting a thorough investigation of a litigation of one member against another of the community, conclude that the former has provided false testimony, they “shall do to him so just as he plotted to do against his brother” (11Q19 61.10). This passage, like the one in Deuteronomy, provides regulations for handling internal conflicts within the community.

The Matthean Version of the Talionic Principle

There are two major differences between the form and function of the talionic principle in Matthew and Deuteronomy. Pertaining to the form, the talionic formula is in Matthew quoted only partially. Jesus repeats only the second (ὁφθαλμὸν ἀντὶ ὁφθαλμοῦ) and the third element (δδόντα ἀντὶ δδόντος) of the formula from Deut 19:21. The most significant alteration is the omission of the first element—ψυχὴν ἀντὶ ψυχῆς (“life for life”). This omission is necessitated by the nature of the specific examples that follow, none of which illustrate a threat to or an actual loss of someone's life. The deletion of the first element probably also indicates that by the first century, the maxim “life for life,” which continued to provide the basis for criminal law and the practice of death penalty, was

has suffered no loss through the false witness—the latter's plot having failed—there is no room for compensation” (*Studies in Biblical Law* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947], 130).

8 11Q19 61.6–12 belongs to a larger section of the *Temple Scroll* extending from col. 51 through col. 66, which Lawrence Schiffman calls “the Deuteronomic Paraphrase”; see Lawrence H. Schiffman, “The Deuteronomic Paraphrase of the *Temple Scroll*,” *RevQ* 15 (1991–1992): 543–67.

separated from the rest of the formula, which became the basis of civil law and personal offenses.⁹ Moreover, individual examples in Matt 5:39b–42 show that Jesus neither presupposes nor combats the literal application of the maiming formula “eye for eye and tooth for tooth.”¹⁰ Thus, the partial quotation of the *lex talionis* in Matt 5:38 points to two restrictions presupposed by the Matthean text: (a) the elimination of criminal offenses, such as murder, and the focus on civil law; and (b) the elimination of the literal application of the *lex* in personal relationships regulated by civil law.¹¹

Pertaining to the function of the talionic principle, Jesus’ instructions in Matt 5:38–42 are directed not to a third party that is asked to arbitrate between two conflicting parties, but solely and directly to the offended individual. Matthew does not mention the appeal to the judges not to show pity that precedes the talionic formula in Deut 19:21. While the communal aspect is still present—the Matthean Jesus addresses his disciples and, by implication, all his followers as a group by using the second person plural verb ἡκούσατε (5:38) and the second person plural personal pronoun ὑμῖν (5:39a)—this should not be confused with the communal aspect of Deut 19:15–21. The corporate “you” in Matt 5:39a is clearly distinct from “an evildoer.”¹² The illustrations in Matt 5:39b–42, which exemplify how Jesus’ followers should act when offended by others, show that the addressed group consists only of individuals who have suffered some kind of injustice. There is no indication that the evildoer is a member of the group, and consequently no direction is given about how the group should secure justice in its own midst.

These alterations enabled Matthew to juxtapose Jesus’ teaching about non-resistance to an evildoer to the *lex talionis* and still maintain that Jesus fulfilled

9 David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 1998), 258.

10 Daube, *New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, 256; contr. Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain* (Matthew 5:3–7:27 and Luke 6:20–49), ed. Adela Y. Collins, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 278–79.

11 For a discussion of the extent to which the talionic principle was literally practiced in ancient Israel and early Judaism, see James F. Davis, *Lex Talionis in Early Judaism and the Exhortation of Jesus in Matthew 5:38–42*, JSNTSup 281 (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 37–104.

12 Most interpreters agree that the substantival adjective τῷ πονηρῷ refers to an evildoer and not to evil as such. For attempts to interpret τῷ πονηρῷ as the instrumental dative (“by evil means”), see Clarence Jordan, *The Substance of Faith and Other Cotton Patch Sermons* (New York: Association Press, 1972), 69; Sebastian Schneider, “Widersteht nicht...? Überlegungen zur Bedeutung von Mt 5,39a im Kontext von Mt 5,38–42,” *BZ* (2009): 161–78.

the Mosaic law. Had Jesus addressed his teaching to the community that was supposed to administer justice among its members and had he asked them to let the perpetrators in their midst go unpunished, his teaching would have directly opposed the Deuteronomic law, which, it should be recalled, did not give this option to the judges. They were not permitted to show mercy because their task was to encourage right behavior by discouraging wrongdoing. By addressing the *lex talionis* to the victims and by omitting the admonition to the judges not to show pity toward the perpetrators, the Matthean Jesus bypasses the community in its role as arbitrator and reinterprets the *lex* in the spirit of the law, found elsewhere, which discourages victims from pursuing their own rights or, if they circumvent the legal system, from retaliating.

The Matthean Notion of Nonresistance

The previous point requires further clarification. The original purpose of the *lex talionis*, whose oldest form appears in the *Code of Hammurabi* §196–201, was protective—to set the limits of retaliation, which would, without such boundaries, frequently exceed the extent of real damage.¹³ While the restrictive function of the talionic principle does not surface in three scriptural passages that contain the formula (Exod 21:22–25; Lev 24:17–21; Deut 19:15–21), it is explicitly mentioned in Philo's critique of contemporary legal practices of imposing punishments on offenders that exceed the extent of their offences (*Spec. Laws* 3.181–82). After listing several irregularities of this kind, Philo proudly declares that “[o]ur law exhorts us to equality when it ordains that the penalties inflicted on offenders should correspond to their actions.”¹⁴ Philo's comments, like other references to the talionic principle in 11Q19 61.6–12, *Jub.* 4:31–32, *L.A.B.* 44:10, *T. Gad* 5:10, and Josephus, *Ant.* 4.280, indicate that the *lex talionis* was generally regarded as a fair principle of retributive justice.

If the *lex* provided the foundation of the realm of expectations of the audience regarding just punishments of the perpetrators, was the Matthean Jesus asking them to refrain from pressing charges if they were offended? Such an understanding certainly comes close if one considers the semantic range of verb ἀνθίστημι in Jesus' principal command, “Do not resist an evildoer.” The

13 Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 219; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 275–76, 283; Michael Welker, “Gewaltverzicht und Feindesliebe,” in *Einfach von Gott reden: Ein theologischer Diskurs*, ed. Jürgen Roloff and Hans G. Ulrich (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1994), 243–44.

14 Philo, *Spec. Laws* 3.182 (Colson, LCL).

basic meaning of this verb in the middle voice, “set oneself against, oppose, resist, withstand,”¹⁵ includes violent resistance, such as armed rebellion of some kind, and verbal resistance, such as testimony against another person given in court or another public setting. Both meanings are attested in the existing literature. In the LXX, ἀνθίστημι sometimes refers to military resistance (Lev 26:37; Deut 9:2; Josh 7:13; Wis 11:3; 1 Macc 6:4; Sir 46:6–7), while in other instances to a testimony against another person (Isa 3:9; 59:12; Jer 14:7).¹⁶ Josephus regularly uses this verb in the context of war or armed rebellion (*J. W.* 2.357; 3.196; 5.89, 96; *Ag. Ap.* 2.23; *Ant.* 4.89; 7.218; 11.23; 12.308; 13.371; 15.115; 17.227; 18.100). In the New Testament, ἀνθίστημι frequently refers to verbal resistance to someone’s testimony (Luke 21:15; Acts 6:10; 13:8; Gal 2:11; 2 Tim 3:8; 4:15), while Rom 13:2 uses this verb to indicate opposition to governmental authorities.

Considering the evidence for the possible meanings of ἀνθίστημι, one could argue that Matt 5:39a prohibits verbal resistance that could be carried out through the existing legal system.¹⁷ On this view, the Matthean Jesus appears to advise his followers to refrain from all legal means of obtaining justice when they suffer injuries. By asking the injured party to desist from pressing charges in court, Jesus’ teaching does not invalidate the *lex talionis* as the principle of proportional justice, which underpins the judiciary process and governs the behavior of the members of a given community, but merely asks the injured party to practice personal restraint and give up certain legal rights.

It is worth asking whether this approach adequately accounts for the situation of the community being addressed by the Matthean Jesus. It presumes that legal recourse is accessible to the addressees and merely calls them to

15 BDAG, s.v. ἀνθίστημι.

16 These are the only three instances in the LXX that, along with Deut 19:18, translate the Hebrew verb נָשָׂא with ἀνθίστημι.

17 See Stuart D. Currie, “Matthew 5:39A—Resistance or Protest?” *HTR* 57 (1964): 140–45. In support of the conclusion that Matt 5:39a refers to seeking damages in court, Currie mentions two references from Athenagoras, *Supplicatio*, which describe Christian application of Jesus’ teaching of nonresistance. The passage in *Supp.* 1.3–4, which explains that Christians do not return blow for blow nor go to law with those who plunder and rob them, shows that Athenagoras understood ἀνθίστημι as a reference to filing a complaint against a perpetrator. Similarly, *Supp.* 11.3 declares that Christians do not take legal recourse against perpetrators when they experience injustices. Cf. also Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 219–20; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 94; Richard A. Horsley, “Ethics and Exegesis: ‘Love Your Enemies’ and the Doctrine of Nonviolence,” *JAAR* 54 (1986): 3–31, see esp. 14; Gordon M. Zerbe, *Non-Retaliation in Early Jewish and New Testament Texts: Ethical Themes in Social Contexts*, JSPSup 13 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 184–85.

forego their own rights in such matters. There are, however, good reasons to believe that Matthew was deeply suspicious of both Jewish and Roman courts of his time. Matthew 5:23–26 portrays a situation of debt and recommends private reconciliation with the accuser rather than a court trial because the poor debtor might be taken to prison until the last penny is paid. Matthew 5:40 envisions the courts that defend the rights of the creditors, i.e., the rights of those who have economic power over the impoverished masses. Jesus' own trials before the Jewish and Roman authorities vividly demonstrate the unfairness and partiality of the existing legal system. The account of the execution of John the Baptist sends a similar message (Matt 14:3–12). Moreover, the rhetorical context of the entire Matthean narrative appears to reflect a situation characterized by a conflict with the Pharisaic-dominated formative Judaism in the post-70 period.¹⁸ Matthew mentions persecutions and false accusations for the sake of Christ (Matt 5:10–12; 10:17–20, 22, 24–25). If the members of Matthew's community lived "as participants in the wider society, but in tension with, over against, as an alternative to its dominant values and structures,"¹⁹ their marginal position vis-à-vis a synagogue community and imperial Rome must have significantly reduced their potential to combat various forms of injustice. If, under such circumstances, Jesus' command not to resist an evildoer refers to a forensic setting, Jesus would be asking his followers to forgo their legal rights, which they, in fact, either did not have or could not exercise. In such a case, a radical element in Jesus' teaching would be lost.

If for Matthew's audience the legal path was not a feasible course of action, they basically had two options. The first one would be to obtain justice by violence. We have seen that the semantic range of ἀνθίσταμαι includes various forms of armed rebellion. Walter Wink, a well-known advocate of this understanding of the text, contends that in the pre-70 historical context, Jesus' message served as a warning against an armed rebellion against Rome. He advised his contemporaries not to oppose the existing oppressive structures violently.²⁰

18 Cf. J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994); David C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

19 Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*, *The Bible & Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 45.

20 Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); Wink, "Beyond Just War and Pacifism: Jesus' Nonviolent Way," *RevExp* 89 (1992): 197–214; Wink, "Neither Passivity nor Violence: Jesus' Third Way (Matt 5:38–42 par.)," in *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament*, ed. Willard M. Swartley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 102–25. Cf. Glen H.

The extent to which Wink's interpretation of Matt 5:38–42 is appropriate to Jesus' Palestinian context lies beyond the scope of this essay.²¹ In the post-70 context, it was all too obvious that an armed rebellion could lead only to tragedy. In such a setting, Jesus' instruction could have easily been heard as a continuous warning to abstain from violent means of obtaining justice.²²

The second option would be to keep grudges and retaliate. Urging a victim to abstain from retaliation is a common *topos* in both Jewish and Greco-Roman literature. Jewish authors consistently ask the injured party to renounce retaliation and leave it either to the appointed authorities or to God. Leviticus 19:18 forbids the taking of vengeance against another member of the community. Deuteronomy 32:35 addresses the problem of vengeance toward Israel's enemies, who are beyond the reach of her legal system, and declares that vengeance is God's. Psalm 94:1–7 calls upon the God of vengeance to render judgment upon the wicked. Proverbs 20:22 discourages repaying evil through personal vengeance and advises waiting for the Lord, while Prov 24:29 explicitly forbids the talionic type of retaliation. In the *Rule of the Community*, the author declares that he will not repay anyone with "the reward of evil" because "with God (resides) the judgment of every living being, and he shall pay man his reward" (1QS 10.17–18). *Second Enoch* 50:2–4 encourages the reader to endure every assault, persecution, and evil word for the sake of the Lord, and to abstain from vengeance. Exhortations to suffer injustices are also frequent in Greco-Roman literature (Plato, *Gorg.* 469c; Seneca, *Ira* 2.33.2; Epictetus, *Ench.* 42; *Diatr.* 3.22.54) and the New Testament (Rom 12:17, 19; 1 Thess 5:15; 1 Pet 3:9).

Given these recurrent appeals to refrain from personal retaliation, Jesus' command about nonresistance to an evildoer could have been heard by Matthew's audience as a radical demand that Jesus' followers should not retaliate at all. This interpretation preserves the original intention of the *lex talionis* as a means of restricting personal vengeance while simultaneously qualifying it through Jesus' teaching on non-retaliation. On this view, Jesus fulfills the intention of the Mosaic law by placing additional, even more radical, restrictions on revenge.

Stassen, "The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21–7:12)," *JBL* 122 (2003): 267–308, see esp. 281.

21 For a critique of Wink's proposal, see Richard A. Horsley, "Response to Walter Wink, 'Neither Passivity nor Violence: Jesus' Third Way,'" in *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament*, 126–32.

22 W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988–1997), 1:542; Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 151.

What is less clear is how this—and for that matter any other—interpretation of Jesus' radical teaching preserves the legal function of the *lex talionis* as a guarantor of fair and just relationships within a community. If the perpetrators expect that the victims will neither press charges, nor violently resist, nor personally retaliate for injustices suffered, will they not be encouraged to continue with their wrongdoings?

Victims' Responses to Injustices

Had the passage ended with the command not to resist an evildoer, or merely with the illustrations of such non-resistance, its message would have been passivism. Victims of injustice would have been expected to endure them silently and to renounce any personal claims to justice. Paul's instruction to the church in Rome not to resist²³ but to submit (ὑποτασσέσθω) to the governing authorities (Rom 13:1–2) shows that the logical opposite of resistance is submission. In the context of asymmetrical relationships, submission is the most natural response of an underdog. According to Seneca, “a contest with one's equal is hazardous, with a superior mad, with an inferior degrading.”²⁴ Luise Schottroff's analysis of different life situations in which the renunciation of vengeance was practiced in antiquity shows that submission was expected from the inferiors.²⁵ Submission to injustices was an expression of slavish mentality that was considered most appropriate for lower classes.²⁶ Submissive behavior was a consequence of their dependent state and the only way of self-preservation. Renunciation of retaliation of the inferiors was not regarded as a meritorious act *per se* but “an imperative arising from necessity.”²⁷

Yet, the individual examples that follow in Matt 5:39b–42 do not illustrate submissive behavior because the victims do not simply accept wrongs done to them but actively respond to the offenders by offering to endure even more wrongs. In each case, Jesus urges the injured party to replace resistance—be it forensic, violent, or vengeful—not with submission but with

23 In Rom 13:2, ἀντιτάσσω and ἀνθίστημι are used as synonyms.

24 Seneca, *Ira* 2.34.1 (Basore, LCL).

25 Luise Schottroff, “Non-Violence and the Love of One's Enemies,” in *Essays on the Love Commandment*, by Luise Schottroff et al., trans. Reginald H. and Ilse Fuller (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 17–22.

26 See Seneca, *Ira* 2.33.2.

27 Schottroff, “Non-Violence and the Love of One's Enemies,” 18.

an unexpected assertion of agency. Such responses are astounding because “they run directly counter to all human instinct, individual or societal.”²⁸

The first illustration envisions a situation in which a person is slapped on the right cheek (Matt 5:39b). David Daube explains that “a slap in the face is a case, not of mutilation, but of insult—a very different thing.”²⁹ Although the *lex talionis* could not, strictly speaking, provide the appropriate basis for dealing with indignity, Matthew’s text suggests that in the first century, the talionic formula could be used for such a purpose.³⁰ Matthew also specifies that the slapped cheek is the right cheek.³¹ In a world where right-handedness was the norm, one could hit another person on the right cheek only with the back of the hand,³² which was regarded a greater offense than a slap with the forearm.³³

The apparent impertinence of the insult could be an indication of an asymmetrical relationship—an act of a superior over an inferior. Walter Wink alleges that a “backhand slap was the usual way of admonishing inferiors. Masters backhanded slaves; husband wives; parents, children; men, women; Romans, Jews.”³⁴ In such situations, passive acceptance of humiliation would have been the most appropriate response. Jesus, however, advises the injured party to take initiative and turn the other cheek too. This surprising gesture of the victim not only shows that the offended person was able to restore his or her injured dignity but also creates a new situation that forces the perpetrator to react. Wink believes that this act robs the superior of the power to humiliate because he would now have to slap the person on the left cheek with his front

28 Dorothy Jean Weaver, “Transforming Nonresistance: From *Lex Talionis* to ‘Do Not Resist the Evil One,’” in *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament*, 32–71, quotation from 55.

29 Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, 257.

30 Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, 264–65.

31 Luke 6:29 speaks about a slap on the cheek in general. *Did.* 1:4 follows the Matthean text, while Justin, *Apol.* 1.16.1 is closer to the Lukan text. For an analysis of the relationship between *Did.* 1:4–5; Matt 5:38–42; and Luke 6:27–36, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:539.

32 This does not mean that a left-handed slap is ruled out, though in this scenario, too, the insult would be more humiliating than a slap with an open right hand. Cf. *1 Esdr.* 4:30, which narrates how Apame, Darius’ concubine, slapped the king with her left hand.

33 The section on penalties in *m. B. Qam.* 8.6 indicates that the rabbis regarded a backhanded slap twice as offensive as a frontheaded slap. A person who slapped another person had to pay 200 *zuz*, but if he slapped him with the back of his hand, the punishment was doubled to 400 *zuz*. In *t. B. Qam.* 9.31, the rabbis explain that the penalty of 400 *zuz* is required “not because it is a painful blow, but because it was a humiliating one.”

34 Wink, “Neither Passivity nor Violence,” 105.

hand and, by doing so, recognize him or her as an equal.³⁵ While Wink probably overstates his case here, he rightly points out that turning the other cheek is an act of provocation that forces the offender to respond. He could refrain from striking again; he could hit the victim with the front hand; or he could hit the inferior even harder than the first time. If the slap is repeated, injustice will be doubled and the perpetrator will be revealed as “an uncivilized brute.”³⁶

The second illustration describes an impoverished debtor, whose undergarment (χιτών) is seized by the court and given to the creditor as a pledge for an unpaid debt.³⁷ According to Exod 22:25–27 and Deut 24:10–13, the creditor could not seize the outer garment (ἱμάτιον) of the debtor, at least not beyond the sunset of the same day. While no such restriction existed for seizing the inner garment, the Matthean text presumes that this request is an unjust act. The characterization of the evildoer as “the one wishing to sue you and take your inner garment” reveals that this injustice would take place through the existing legal system. Since, however, a demand for a pledge by the creditor is warranted by the nature of financial relationships between the creditor and the debtor, the loss of the undergarment cannot be a wrongful act *per se*. It is more likely that the litigation by the creditor represents an insult on the debtor’s human dignity because it exposes his impoverishment and misery to the public eye.³⁸ In such a situation, the most natural response would be to surrender the inner garment without resistance. Jesus, however, encourages the debtor to perform a provocative act—to give his outer garment too. This risky behavior—because the debtor could end up in prison for exposing his nakedness³⁹—could have two possible outcomes. The creditor could refuse to take the outer garment. Or, the creditor could take the tunic alongside the undergarment and double the injustice, but if he does so, he would expose himself as an oppressor who exploits his subjects to the point of complete impoverishment.

35 Wink, “Neither Passivity nor Violence,” 105–106.

36 Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 290.

37 Luke 6:29b presupposes a robbery, not a court trial. Also, the garments in Luke are reversed. The Lukan Jesus presumes that a robber steals a more valuable outer garment (ἱμάτιον) and advises the victim to give his undergarment (χιτών) as well.

38 Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, 258; Wink, “Neither Passivity nor Violence,” 107.

39 Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:545.

The third illustration envisions a situation of forced labor,⁴⁰ common in the context of Roman political and military domination.⁴¹ The one who forces someone else to go one mile is most likely a Roman soldier who was legally permitted to demand a certain amount of free service from a resident of an occupied territory, such as carrying his military gear for one mile. Forced labor was humiliating and intensely resented by domestic populations. Hans Dieter Betz notes that “the victim of such a despicable request was legally obliged to comply.”⁴² A civilian asked for compulsory service did not have so many options. The most natural response would be to do what is required.⁴³ Yet, Jesus advises his followers to willingly offer to carry the equipment of the soldier for another mile. This surprising and provocative act forces the soldier to make a choice. He could refuse the offer and perhaps become more perceptive of the exploitative character of the forced labor. Or, he could double the compulsory service and thus increase the injustice done to the person in question.

Most interpreters admit that it is difficult to understand the fourth illustration as a clear-cut example of injustice. It seems that Jesus merely tells his followers not to refuse a person who begs for money or asks for a loan. Since, however, the Matthean text presumes the inappropriateness of these demands, it is customary to treat them as importunate requests. Even so, the fourth illustration does not easily conform to the first three examples that “reflect the experiences of ‘little people’ who are beaten, who are threatened by debtor’s trials, and who suffer under foreign occupation.”⁴⁴

40 This example is not found in the Lukan parallel of Jesus’ core sayings (Luke 6:29–30), but it occurs in *Did.* 1:4 and Justin, *Apol.* 1.16.2.

41 The verb ἀγγαρεύω refers to compulsory service; see Matt 27:32 and Mark 15:21. This practice is usually traced back to the Persian custom, which was continued by the Romans; cf. F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and rev. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 6.

42 Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 291.

43 Epictetus, *Diatr.* 4.1.79, advises the civilian asked for ἀγγαρεία to “let it go, do not resist nor grumble. If you do, you will get a beating and lose your little donkey just the same” (Oldfather, LCL).

44 Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 273.

Conditions for a Restoration of Justice

In their Matthean setting, all four sayings presume that the offenders are evildoers. Yet, it is far from clear why a superior who slaps an inferior, a creditor who demands a pledge, a soldier who requires forced labor, or a beggar who asks for a loan exemplify wicked individuals. Since “people are not called ‘bad’ because they are intrinsically evil but because they commit unlawful acts,”⁴⁵ the clue for the characterization of these individuals as evil must be sought in the character of their acts. Each example presupposes that the victim has suffered some kind of wrongdoing, but the wrongness of the committed acts is not always so apparent. The most obvious injustice is the humiliation inflicted upon a person through a backhanded slap. Even here, however, the wrongness of the act is blurred if both the superior and the inferior presume that this kind of insult is appropriate to asymmetrical relationships.⁴⁶ In the second illustration, the demand for an undergarment, which humiliates the debtor, is based on the right of the creditor to obtain a pledge. Injustice is built into the system of economic exploitation. Similarly, forced labor, which was condescending and humiliating for the local population, was a common means of exploiting conquered people. Finally, constant requests for charity or loans indicate a deeply ingrained division between the haves and the have-nots.

The radical—and quite unique—nature of the victims’ responses in Matt 5:39b–42 could be better perceived if we compare them with the advice to those who suffer unjustly elsewhere in the New Testament. In 1 Thess 5:15, Paul combines his plea not to repay evil for evil with the command to “always seek to do good to one another and to all.” In Rom 12:17a, he amplifies a similar request about what one should not do (“repay no one evil for evil”) with several demands about what one should do: pursue what is noble in the sight of all (Rom 12:17b), live peaceably with all (Rom 12:18), feed and give drink to the enemy (Rom 12:20), and thereby “overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21). The author of 1 Peter urges his audience to imitate Christ, who “when he was abused ... did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten” (1 Pet 2:23). In 1 Pet 3:9, the author expands the general principle of not repaying evil for evil with a positive appeal to bless one’s adversaries.

45 Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 292.

46 Cf. the parable of the unfaithful servant in Matt 24:45–51, which depicts a former servant who temporarily exchanges his role of a slave for that of a master and starts beating his fellow servants. Gustav Stählin notes that “striking and carousing are an enviable prerogative of masters according to the opinion of slaves” (“τύπτων,” *TDNT* 8:263).

The Matthean audience, however, is not asked simply to endure unjust suffering or to respond to persecutors with acts of kindness—although such an attitude is certainly presumed, as love for enemies in the next paragraph (Matt 5:43–48) clearly illustrates—but to be willing to suffer further injustices. Since Matt 5:38–42 assumes that the perpetrators are not members of the community of Jesus' followers, the latter are not in a position to correct the committed wrongs through disciplinary measures, such as those described in Matt 18:15–20. In this situation, the provocative acts of the victims seem to be the only means of addressing injustices. They enable them to start acting not as subordinates who are forced to endure humiliation out of necessity, but as active agents who offer to suffer further wrongs by choice. In addition, their unexpected conduct forces the perpetrators to react, either by abandoning their abusive behavior or by committing further injustices. Either way, they create new situations with potentially different outcomes. The victims' readiness to suffer additional damages could expose to the public eye injustices that had previously been hidden.⁴⁷

If, then, the provocative acts of the victims have the potential of unmasking the true character of injustices, they could be regarded as acts whose end-result resembles the end-result of a thorough enquiry of the judges, described in Deut 19:15–21. In both cases, the real character of an unjust act is concealed and must be exposed before it can be properly addressed. In Deut 19:15–21, this is the task of the judges. In Matt 5:38–42, this seems to be the task of the victims. It is difficult to recognize and eventually correct injustices when they become embedded in the economic and political system because those who perpetrate them often no longer recognize them as such. Even the victims of injustice may internalize them to such a degree that they begin to exhibit "both servile actions and a servile mentality."⁴⁸ Injustices must be seen and acknowledged as such before any restoration of justice can take place.⁴⁹

A word of caution is in order. Saying that the willingness of an injured party to suffer further injustices creates the conditions under which unjust acts and their perpetrators could reveal their true character does not mean that the outcome is in any way assured. The salient feature of Matt 5:38–42 is that it

47 Wink, "Neither Passivity nor Violence," 108.

48 Wink, "Neither Passivity nor Violence," 111.

49 Luz (*Matthew* 1–7, 274) believes that the responses of the victims "are the expression of a protest against dehumanizing spirals of violence and of the hope for a different kind of personal behavior than what can be experienced in everyday life."

shows no concern for the effectiveness of its prescribed responses to injustice.⁵⁰ “It may be that the hitter will double up his fist for another blow, that the poor man will freeze without his cloak, or that the hostile power becomes even stronger.”⁵¹ But it may also be that the victim’s willingness to suffer further wrongdoings will inspire the hitter, the creditor, and the hostile power to respond with kindness.

Conclusion

By directing the *lex talionis* not to a council of judges charged with the task of solving a dispute between two members of the community, as in Deut 19:15–21, but to the offended party, Matthew is able to maintain that Jesus indeed fulfills the Mosaic law by realizing its underlying intent. On the one hand, the injured party should neither violently resist nor retaliate against the perpetrator. On the other hand, the victim should be willing to suffer further injustices, which, in turn, could reveal their true character and thus provide conditions for possible transformation. Strictly speaking, this is an alternative way of establishing justice because it is not based on the equivalence of the offense and the punishment but on a restoration of humanness of both the victim and the perpetrator. The victims restore their insulted dignity by taking initiative, which empowers them freely, and somewhat provocatively, to offer to do more than what they were originally forced or asked for. These gestures, in turn, give opportunities to offenders to reconsider their unjust deeds and decide whether they should continue committing them or cease and desist. If they choose the former, the true character of their injustice will be exposed and the offenders will be unmasked as evildoers. If they choose the latter, the offenders will be able to restore their lost humanity and dissociate themselves from the previously committed injustices.

One of the results of the preceding analysis of Matt 5:38–42 is a renewed recognition of its particularity. If Jesus’ exhortations in Matthew are addressed

50 Betz (*The Sermon on the Mount*, 285, 293) argues that the ethical responsibility of the victims to act justly should be distinguished from the effectiveness of their actual behavior. He notes that “there are many examples where the strategy fails; but success or failure of alternative action is not the concern of this particular argument. Neither the interpretation of the *ius talionis* nor the validity of the ethical stance is conditioned by success or failure of the strategy. Even in the case of failure, justice has been served on the part of the ethically responsible person implementing the demand of the S[ermon on the] M[ount].”

51 Luz, *Matthew* 1–7, 274.

to a community that was marginalized vis-à-vis Rabbinic Judaism and imperial Rome, they empower the audience to act and show initiative in addressing wrongs. By encouraging the victims to challenge the existing system of embedded injustices, even when their oppressive character is concealed, Jesus shows them a way of restoring their human dignity and a sense of worth. He assigns them the role of unmasking and exposing wrongs, which is, according to Deut 19:15–21, a task of the judicial system. The silence of the text regarding the effectiveness of this method of dealing with wrongful acts indicates that it is more concerned with the proper attitude of an individual, i.e., one's ethical responsibility, than with the outcome of a person's actions. Human acts must have a certain quality even when they do not achieve the desired results. They create only the possibility for transformation, allowing the kingdom of God to break into the world dominated by violence and oppression. The actual outcome solely depends upon the reactions of the offenders, who could respond with benevolence but also with further injustices.

This open-endedness of the text, not to mention Jesus' own passion, leaves the impression that in many cases injustice may prevail. Matthew does not appear worried by this possibility because he places Jesus' exhortations into a larger eschatological framework that provides the ultimate assurance that at the final judgment no injustice will remain unaddressed: "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done" (Matt 16:27). In this way, the principle of proportionality as the basis for just relationships receives its final and ultimate validation.

Oeuvre Mouvante: The Gospels as Living Traditions

Edwin K. Broadhead

The history of research on the gospels of the New Testament has been dominated by the question of what they are and how they function. Throughout his career, Alan Culpepper has addressed these issues in a variety of ways, with a particular concern to counter the atomization of the text. While the bulk of his studies focused upon the Fourth Gospel, Culpepper has written major works upon each of the gospels.

Here the question—what are the gospels and how do they function—is posed anew as a retrospective upon the history of gospel studies and upon the contributions of Culpepper to that history. The Gospel of Matthew will be used to propose a way forward.

What They are and How They Function: A Retrospective View

The presence of material artifacts in the form of written gospels seemed, for most, to settle the issue of what the gospels are, and attention was given largely to the question of how they function. The gospels have been seen as written texts that provide points of connection or means of access to a variety of foundational moments or events.

Through much of the history of interpretation, there was presumed to be a one-to-one relationship between the gospel accounts and the historical figure of Jesus. In this view the gospels were faithful, if selective, testimonies to what Jesus said and did. This may be a factor in the late and inconsistent attribution of the gospels to individual writers.¹ With this apostolic attribution, differences in the shape of the testimony (*logia*, remembrances, orderly or not) were believed to reflect the particular evangelist. Matthew was said to have recorded the *logia* (sayings) of Jesus in Hebrew, then each had to translate them as they could. The lack of order in the Gospel of Mark is explained as Mark's recording of Peter's memories.

Source Criticism identified the use and reformulation of sources and thus severed the lines of direct transmission. The Form Critics envisioned stages of

1 Without a superscript the Gospel of Mark would be read as “the gospel of Jesus Christ (Son of God)” (Mark 1:1).

development, and the gospels were seen as points of connection to the traditions and the life settings of the primitive church. In this approach, the gospels were the product of a regimented, almost inevitable evolution of early Christian tradition for use in the community. Through a type of theological archeology, one could reach the ground layer of the primitive church and its kerygma of Jesus.

Redaction Critics shifted from inevitable, structured lines of transmission to focus on the power of an editor to collect and arrange tradition into a new narrative. Eventually the primary focus would turn to the person manipulating the tradition in order to address a particular community. Thus, the gospels could be connected, for example, to the interests and skills of Matthew and to his address to a mixed community in the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem.

Narrative studies turned to the internal workings of the text, seeking to connect in an explicit way to the story that was told and to the discourse through which it was presented. In this way the evangelist became a literary genius, designing and implementing a narrative with internal consistency, coherence, and resolution. Literary critics also considered the connection of the narrative to an audience, both ancient and modern. In each of these stages of interpretation, an author controlled a text that provided connections and means of access to foundational events and ideas.

A theological agenda can be observed in each of these approaches. Whether the gospels connected to an echo of the words and deeds of Jesus, to apostolic testimony, to the kerygma of primitive Christianity, or to the design of the evangelist and the needs of his community, the gospels were seen as written artifacts that provided a means of access to theological bedrock.

R. Alan Culpepper and the Johannine Universe

Alan Culpepper has produced an impressive range of publications across a diverse field of focus. Central to his scholarship are studies that engage the question of what the gospels are and how they function.

The Fourth Gospel as the Product of a Johannine School

Culpepper notes that the idea of a Johannine school is an old one that was revived in the 1960s and 1970s.² The concept was first employed as a way to come to terms with the differences between the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine letters while maintaining the authority of the apostle John:

² R. Alan Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 307.

differences among these writings could then be explained in terms of different authors, while the similarities among the writings and their later attribution to John could be explained on the basis of origin from a closely-knit community around the apostle.³

In his 1975 doctoral dissertation, entitled *The Johannine School*, Culpepper looked at the characteristics of ancient schools and asked if the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine epistles reflect these traits.⁴ Culpepper accepted the idea that the linguistic and theological similarities and dissimilarities among the Johannine writings can be explained by several writers working within a common school. For Culpepper,

the self-understanding of the community is vitally linked to its regard for the Beloved Disciple as the founder of the community. He served as its authority and source for the traditions about Jesus, and was venerated as an eyewitness and the ideal disciple, though he was probably not one of the Twelve, and hence not the apostle John.⁵

This position is crucial for the question of authorship.

The Beloved Disciple, the evangelist, the redactor, the elder, and the seer are viewed as different persons, and their relationship to one another may be best understood on the basis of the pattern of an ancient school in which disciples carry on the work and teachings of an esteemed founder.

... With this work, however, the role of the apostle John is effectively separated from the hypothesis of a Johannine school, and the latter no longer serves a means of relating the Johannine writings directly or indirectly to the apostle.⁶

Thus, in the first stage of his career Culpepper addressed aspects of what the gospels are and how they function—a central question in the history of scholarship—primarily through the lens of authorship. Focusing on the existence of both similarities and differences within the Johannine texts,

³ Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 307.

⁴ R. Alan Culpepper, *The Johannine School*, SBLDS 26 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975, reprint 2007).

⁵ Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 310.

⁶ Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 310.

Culpepper reformulated the question of authorship through a school model, and the authorship of the apostle John was abandoned.

The Johannine Narrative

In 1983, Culpepper turned to the narrative world to ask what it contains and how it functions. On methodological grounds, questions of historicity and composition history were suspended, at least temporarily,⁷ and Culpepper focused primarily upon plot and characterization. He recalls that

Writing *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* was exciting because I knew there were not many others who were thinking about John in terms of contemporary literary theory, so I was exploring unmapped territory.... The conversation *Anatomy* sparked has led others to refine and extend the lines it tentatively laid down and to advance our understandings of the areas surveyed in its chapters. Once the horizons of Gospel studies were pushed back, others moved on to other readings of John, so Johannine studies have continued to thrive, embracing new approaches while revisiting traditional concerns with new perspectives.⁸

Thus, the question of what the gospels are and how they function is transformed: the gospels are now seen as texts that create a self-referential narrative world within which various elements and dynamics are at work. While Culpepper excluded historicity and composition history on methodological grounds in such studies, he never became a formalist or a deconstructionist. Indeed, the tie to an author (implied and real) occasionally seeps through the seams of the closed narrative world, sometimes with clear intentions and designs.

The Johannine Design and Theology

For Culpepper, the focus on the narrative world in *Anatomy* and in a host of subsequent publications opened up to the question of Johannine design and theology. Here the moves of the narrative are linked to the intent, design, and theological construction of the evangelist.

In this approach the gospels are texts with an intentional design and didactic function. By way of example, Culpepper considered how narrative strategies are employed to articulate different theological understandings of Jesus' death.

⁷ *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism*, ed. Tom Thatcher (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2008), 40. See R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

⁸ *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism*, 39–40.

This paper focuses on the didactic function of the interpretation of Jesus' death in each of the Gospels as it is conveyed through the narrative's implicit commentary. It suggests the evangelists tied the developing self-understanding of the emerging Christian communities to the death of Jesus.⁹

This is done, says Culpepper, through the evangelists' literary designs.

The evangelists, however, were writing narratives, not epistles or homilies, so they did not have the freedom to explain the meaning of Jesus' death as they saw it. Instead, they had to employ a variety of indirect means to express the meaning it held for them, and potentially for their communities.... Explicit commentary is minimal in the accounts of Jesus' death, as it is in the rest of the Gospels.... In contrast, the evangelists rely heavily on implicit commentary.¹⁰

This description of the narrative design and theological function is framed in the language of authorial intent. When seen alongside the work of Mark, Matthew, and Luke, "... John develops a rich portrait by which the church could define itself through the themes, images, and allusions of the Johannine passion narrative."¹¹

The Johannine Community

Culpepper connected the workings of the narrative not only to the author, but also to the community. In doing so, Culpepper takes up and extends the focus of Raymond Brown, J. Louis Martyn, and others on the dynamics at work in the Johannine community.¹²

This focus is illustrated in Culpepper's chapter designed to set the stage for a scholarly conversation on the Johannine community.

The title for this volume conveys an obvious double entendre: *Communities in Dispute*. It signals both that the essays in this volume deal with the Johannine Epistles as artifacts of ancient communities in

9 R. Alan Culpepper, "Designs for the Church in the Gospel Accounts of Jesus' Death," *NTS* 51 (2005), 376–92, quotation from 376.

10 Culpepper, "Designs for the Church," 376.

11 Culpepper, "Designs for the Church," 376.

12 Raymond Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979); J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

dispute, as some think, over the gospel tradition and that they represent the disputes in current scholarship over the interpretation of these short letters.¹³

Culpepper believes the Johannine Epistles provide access to the dynamics at work in the community.

Taken together, these three letters offer a window into the disputes among individuals and communities related to the Johannine tradition, if not the Gospel itself. How were the doctrinal and ethical debates brokered? What authority did the church or community leaders have? How are the Epistles related to the Gospel—chronologically and theologically?¹⁴

Culpepper notes that this concern is not new and that it invokes the question of authorship:

The “disputes” over these issues reach back over a century in New Testament scholarship. The springboard for much of this debate has been the question of authorship of the Epistles. Were they written by the Apostle John, the Fourth Evangelist, and the author of the Revelation, as tradition and orthodoxy hold, or were they written by another early Christian leader, John the Elder, or an otherwise unknown associate or disciple of the Beloved Disciple or the Fourth Evangelist?¹⁵

Culpepper also considered the relevance of these dynamics for the disputes within his own faith community.¹⁶ Thus, the question of what the gospels are and how they function comes full circle in Culpepper’s later writings.

Summation

The research of Alan Culpepper is characterized by close attention to the workings of the text. His groundbreaking foray into the narrative world of the Fourth Gospel challenged the atomization of the text and opened up

13 R. Alan Culpepper, “Setting the Stage: The Context for the Conversation,” in *Communities in Dispute: Current Scholarship on the Johannine Epistles*, ed. Paul N. Anderson and R. Alan Culpepper (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 3–15, quotation from 3.

14 Culpepper, “Setting the Stage,” 3.

15 Culpepper, “Setting the Stage,” 3.

16 R. Alan Culpepper, “Synthesis and Schism in the Johannine Community and the Southern Baptist Convention,” *PRSt* 13 (1986), 1–20.

new ways of describing how the story and the discourse unfold. Culpepper continues to pursue various ways in which the text provides connections to the Johannine community and to the design and theological construction within the Johannine world.

Throughout his work, Culpepper is persistent in understanding the gospels as inscribed texts—as a type of written artifacts—under authorial design and control. His view of the function of the gospels, however, is more dynamic and diverse. The Johannine literature provides points of connection or means of access to varying concerns: the Johannine school, the narrative world, literary and theological design, a community in conflict. One could argue that Culpepper's epistemology of the text exerts evolutionary pressure upon his ontology of the text—that his understanding of what the gospels are is challenged by his work on what the gospels do.

Culpepper's literary approach sheds important light on what the gospels do when read as stable, intentional, coherent texts, and he is known primarily for his insightful and groundbreaking work in *Anatomy*. In my opinion, his initial work on the development of texts within the dynamics of a Johannine school is even more noteworthy. Here the composition of the gospel is considered within a larger field of collective discourse—the creative work of schools in antiquity. His subsequent pursuit of the situation and the rhetorical claims of the larger Johannine community represent, in my opinion, further steps in the direction of understanding the gospels as collective, adaptive works rooted in and reflective of historical, cultural landscapes. By seeking to place the composition of the text within a working school and by subsequently seeking the community at work within the text, this functional strand of Culpepper's research evokes, *in nuce*, the identity of the gospels not as written artifacts but as participants in and examples of the wider dynamics of human discourse.¹⁷

The Gospel of Matthew and the Prospective Value of *Mouvance*

When narrative studies turn their eye to history, they typically do so through reference to the author. The story and discourse of the narrative are usually taken as consciously designed didactic address to a specific community. The hermeneutical circle is typically a tight one, however, for the shape of the community is usually a mirror image of the primary concerns of the narrative—and thus of the reconstructed author.

17 It seems to me this is precisely what Culpepper has done with the figure of John, the Son of Zebedee.

Is there a way to move forward from this limited circle, from its mostly linear, unidirectional connections, and from the danger of constructing shallow and suspicious historical images of author and community? I would argue that the answer lies in the part-whole and object-field relationships of human discourse. How can we analyze a text on its own terms as it is available to us, yet perceive and value its essential status within a larger conceptual universe?

As early as 1992 I described my approach to the Gospel of Mark as a “formalistic analysis set within a *traditionsgeschichtliche* context.”¹⁸ I sought to describe the contents and the dynamics of a gospel through a descriptive narrative grammar that echoed the patterns of sentence grammar. Thus, I gave attention to the morphology of the miracle stories and to the syntactical patterns through which they created a portrait of Jesus. For the sake of analysis and methodological purity, issues of historical setting, author, or reader were excluded from the field of analysis. The result was a formalistic, descriptive grammar of the way miracle stories are framed and function within the Gospel of Mark.

Thus, a tightly-controlled formal analysis at the literary level was carried out with descriptive grammatical tools gleaned from the linguistic level. In the larger view, this local, formalistic analysis was then connected in an explicit way to the more global issues of history (through traditions and authors) and of hermeneutics (through readers).¹⁹ Thus, the miracle stories were investigated through a formalistic approach set in a *traditionsgeschichtliche* (history of traditions) context.

I have attempted to extend and refine this approach in my recent work on the Gospel of Matthew.²⁰ A formal analysis shows that the narrative world of the Gospel of Matthew is marked by disjunction, conflict, and contradiction. A similar dissonance is found among interpreters, with contradictory readings rooted in the same text. If this is a narrative under the control of an author, then the failure to create coherence, consistency, and resolution calls into question his competence. While the history of research, almost without exception, attributes the design and function of the Gospel to Matthew, this dissonance led me to consider a wider framework for understanding how this gospel was produced, how it functions, and what it is.

18 Edwin Broadhead, *Teaching with Authority: Miracles and Christology in the Gospel of Mark* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 217.

19 See the chart in Broadhead, *Teaching with Authority*, 52.

20 Edwin Broadhead, *The Gospel of Matthew on the Landscape of Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2017).

The primary key to understanding the Gospel of Matthew—what it is and how it functions—is not to be found in a reconstruction of the *persona* of Matthew, but rather in the larger Tradition History of this gospel—how it was composed, used, and transmitted across changing eras and landscapes. The Gospel of Matthew is not a foundational, fixed, and final text. It is characterized by and functions through *mouvance*, and it is, in its essence, an *oeuvre mouvante*—a Living Tradition.

Mouvance: A Definition

Paul Zumthor employed the term *mouvance* in his literary analysis of medieval French poetry.²¹ Some medieval works have a known author and a rather stable history of transmission, but Zumthor recognized that other texts combine authorial anonymity with high levels of textual variation. Such variation is not simply an issue of language or style, but involves various levels of reshaping the texts.

The term *mouvance*, which has different connotations and is difficult to translate into English, can be used in a variety of ways to refer to movement, motion, shift, variability.²² Zumthor uses the concept to explain how some texts develop through a variety of manifestations, with no apparent original and no known author. He believes such authorial anonymity and textual variation are connected, and he seeks to redefine, for medieval literature, the understanding of the *oeuvre* (work). Rather than seeing the work as the production of the author to be recovered through a stemma of texts, Zumthor explores the category of *oeuvre mouvante*, which means “a work in motion” or “a work in progress.”

A text that is *oeuvre mouvante* is characterized by four key traits:

authorial anonymity,
collective rewriting,
influence from oral tradition,
textual changes for changing audiences or functions.²³

21 Paul Zumthor, “Essai de poétique médiévale,” *Collection Poétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1972).

22 Possibilities are listed at <http://context2.reverso.net/info.php?q=mouvance>.

23 See Bella Millet, “What is *mouvance*?” found at <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/~wpwt/mouvance/mouvance.htm>.

By way of example, the *Song of Roland* is known through four distinct text types with no reconstructable stemma. Zumthor places the traditions side by side and refers to them as the *Songs of Roland*.²⁴

Mouvance as a Narrative Norm

It is possible—though not simple—to argue that some manuscripts make available to the reader a foundational, fixed, final text as it was designed and shaped by its author. The norm, however, is not the fixed artifact, but the developing tradition.

This is particularly true in antiquity. Likely based on historical events from the 12th or 13th century BCE, the traditions of the *Iliad* circulated and developed in the oral performances of generations of bards. The text was likely written down only in the 8th century BCE by Homer. This evolving, adaptive tale far exceeds the influence of any author: the *Iliad* represents and generates and enforces the language of Greek and the values of being Greek, creating a type of panhellenic ideal.

The Pentateuch was imposed by Ezra as a guide for Israel in the aftermath of the exile and in connection to the rebuilding of the Temple (c. 450 BCE). But Ezra did not write the Pentateuch; it was composed in Babylon by priestly sects to explain the failure of the covenant through Israel's disobedience. They did so by reformulating the ancient pre-exilic epics written in the name of Yahweh (J) and Elohim (E) and linking them to the Deuteronomic traditions. The Pentateuch was instituted not as a fixed scribal artifact, but as a tradition developing across various eras to address changing landscapes. There appear to be several traditions of the Pentateuch in use at Qumran.

The book of Isaiah is composed of three distinct literary units (chapters 1–39; 40–55; 56–66) that traverse geographically from Babylon and Persia to Jerusalem and temporally from perhaps 742 BCE to 500 BCE. The first wave of analysis of the Dead Sea Scrolls (1st century BCE to 1st century CE) described “a remarkable agreement between the ancient Isaiah and the version known through the Masoretic Text.”²⁵ This led to the conclusion that the Isaiah scroll “confirms the antiquity and authenticity of the Masoretic text.”²⁶ This was wishful thinking. Some twenty other copies of Isaiah were found at Qumran,

24 Oxford, Venice 4, Venice 7, Chateauroux.

25 See the discussion in Werner Kelber, “The History of the Closure of Biblical Texts,” in his collection of works entitled *The Interface of Orality and Writing: Speaking, Seeing, Writing in the Shaping of New Genres*, ed. Annette Weissenrieder and Robert B. Coote (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 71–99, quotation from 76.

26 Cited in Kelber, “The History of the Closure of Biblical Texts,” 76.

and one was found at Wadi Muraba'at. Six commentaries (*pesharim*) on Isaiah were also found at Qumran, and Isaiah is quoted in many of the other scrolls from Qumran. There is significant diversity among these Isaiah texts. The great irony, of course, is that Isaiah is itself a composite text.

This variability is not limited to biblical texts at Qumran. The Damascus Document, for example, is a living tradition that emerges in various forms across a broad span of time and place and interest.

Developing traditions are also normative through much of modern literature. The American stories of *Br'er Rabbit* are shaped by Navaho traditions and echo the wisdom tales circulating among the peoples of Africa. Such accounts make up a genre known as the Trickster Tale, and they are found in oral cultures throughout the world. Their commonality may be based in human neurology as much as cultural contact.

A young Polish writer named Yitskhok Zynger, in the days leading up to the Holocaust, drew on his early memories of the streets of Warsaw and upon his years as a teenager in an isolated Jewish village. He brought these images together to confront the growing threat of the Nazis, but he did so by narrating, in Yiddish, the evil that had annihilated a Jewish village in 1648 and the messianic hysteria that followed in its wake. When this 1935 Yiddish work was published in English in 1955, it appeared as *Satan in Goray* by Isaac Bashevis Singer. Khayke Beruriah Wiegand distinguishes between "the Yiddish Bashevis" and "his American construct I. B. Singer," and she calls his English work a betrayal.²⁷

Literary works in antiquity were normally defined by their viability through a durative tradition history that extended across generations and diverse contexts and landscapes. It is also clear that orality played a key role in this dynamic, generative process and that such traditions function to establish and regulate communities. This pattern continues in more recent literary traditions.

The Gospel of Matthew as *Oeuvre Mouvante*

The Gospel of Matthew does not come to us as a foundational, fixed, final text shaped under the control of an intentional author, but rather as a viable, malleable, developing tradition. Its history of development is a generative process characterized by the *mouvance* of a Living Tradition. This can be seen in various regions of the Tradition History.

27 Wiegand's work was presented in a paper entitled "The Yiddish Bashevis and His American Construct I. B. Singer: Questions of Language, Register, Translation and Betrayal." I am grateful for her permission to use this material.

Manuscript History

The manuscript history of the Gospel of Matthew is characterized by *mouvance*. The textual evidence is partial and fragmentary, but it is also marked by variation. We have only 13 or 14 manuscript fragments that pre-date the Council of Nicaea (325 CE), and we do not have evidence that these fragments are connected in any genealogical relationship. We are left to reconstruct a text primarily from Sinaiticus, which has its own history of variability.²⁸

Composition History

Scholars have long argued that the Gospel of Matthew draws upon a variety of existing material. I have argued these are more than sources subject to the manipulation of an editor or author: they are the traditions of various faith communities, and they are typically carried by tradents. Such traditions have their own history, their own sponsors, and their own *gravitas*. They are changed by their incorporation into a new narrative, but they are also agents of change within a new narrative context.

I have argued that the Gospel of Matthew is constituted around competing traditions circulating among Jewish followers of Jesus.²⁹ For the most part, the Gospel of Matthew is a revised edition of the Gospel of Mark, formulated in a dialectical engagement with the Sayings Tradition (Q). The Gospel of Mark brings content and structure, but it also brings a lax view toward cultic law and some foundational elements of Judaism. The Sayings Tradition brings the teaching of Jesus and faithfulness to Torah, but it also brings a truncated view of eschatology and a narrow understanding of ecclesiology. The citation and allusion to scripture casts the narrative against the backdrop of God's history with Israel, but it often does so in a deterministic or judgmental way. The special material known as M is a local tradition with three levels of response toward the Pharisaic tradition: absolute respect, distance, disdain. Traditions about Peter offer a case study in contradiction. The constructed units of the birth narrative and the final commission serve as brackets, but they contradict the conceptual world that dominates in the body of the story.

28 At least three scribes were involved in the initial copying, and they revised and corrected their own work. From about 400 CE to 600 CE the codex was revised by a succession of correctors, with six responsible for the majority of revisions. Altogether, there are some 23,000 revisions to the codex, making an average of about 30 per page. For detailed discussion see David Parker, *The Story of the World's Oldest Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010).

29 For detailed analysis, see Broadhead, *The Gospel of Matthew on the Landscape of Antiquity*, 109–135.

Thus, the Gospel of Matthew is built upon the gathering of viable traditions. The confluence of these traditions does not silence the dissonance of their voices. Indeed, in some places the editorial work has enhanced this dissonance.

Any attempt to ameliorate this conflict by appealing to authorial intent or literary coherence is unconvincing. This gathering of traditions is not simply genealogical or anecdotal. This confluence of competing voices plays an essential role in the function and identity of the Gospel of Matthew.

The Face of the Narrative

The quality of variability and dialectical engagement echoes through the narrative world of the Gospel of Matthew.³⁰ Disjunction, conflict, and contradiction are found in the structural framework. While the Gospel of Matthew is built primarily upon the narrative plot of the Gospel of Mark, this material is appropriated in two different ways. Matthew 12–28 provides a revised edition of Mark 2:12–4:34; 6:1–16:8 with constructed discourses inserted (in Matt 13:1–53; Matt 18; and Matt 23–25). In contrast, Matt 4:23–11:30 is a more chaotic expansion and reworking of Mark 1:2–2:22 and other materials. Appended to these major units are the prologue of Matt 1:1–4:22 and the conclusion of Matt 28:11–20, providing a universal focus over against the distinctly Jewish narrative of the life of Jesus.

Disjunction, conflict, and contradiction are also found in the conceptual world of the Gospel of Matthew. This can be seen in the conflicting commissions given to the disciples—“Israel only” versus “all nations.” There are numerous tensions and contradictions within the teaching of Jesus over issues such as the Law, the place of the Gentiles, the revision of Torah, commands to secrecy.

A similar dissonance and discord is found in the linguistic profile of the story when Jesus uses the same term in different ways, when appropriated material is carelessly linked, when parallelism is deconstructed. Thus, the competing voices at work on the face of the narrative echo the competing traditions that have been drawn, through reciprocal engagement, into the composition of this gospel.

Transmission History

The Gospel of Matthew was transmitted along three distinct trajectories. The tradition we know from Sinaiticus was taken up into the canon and became a central component in the story of Gentile orthodoxy. The Gospel of Matthew

30 See the discussion in Broadhead, *The Gospel of Matthew on the Landscape of Antiquity*, 25–47.

endured among Jewish followers of Jesus in the form of Hebrew Matthew. A Hebrew form of the Gospel of Matthew circulates in the medieval era and is used by rabbis in Jewish-Christian debates.³¹

The History of Interpretation

It is obvious that the history of interpretation is marked by dissonance and conflicting readings. It is noteworthy that qualified scholars can and do offer conflicting readings that are each rooted in elements of the narrative. This variability of interpretation reflects the variability of the text and of its composition history.

Paul Armstrong argues that this is an expected quality of literature. Literary texts are heteronomous to their interpreters—the literary work is “neither dependent on nor autonomous of interpretation, but paradoxically both at once.”³² This quality is rooted in the intersubjectivity of the text—its existence through dialectical engagements.³³ It is because of this heteronomous stance that a text can be heterogeneous—that it can operate across a wide semantic field. Thus, says Armstrong, the epistemology of a text (its structures of understanding) is variable because its ontology (the being of the text) is variable.³⁴ Because of this historical variability, says Armstrong, “a heteronomous text cannot be limited to the meanings its author may have originally intended to convey.”³⁵

This generative quality of *mouvance* becomes evident in the workings of the Gospel of Matthew. The variability in interpretation is a reflection of the variability engrained in the face of the narrative and throughout the history of the tradition. The Gospel of Matthew is not a written artifact that functions as a point of access. It is not a fixed foundational narrative offering final standards of interpretation. The Gospel of Matthew exists in a durative, collective process of reciprocity and dialectical engagement that opens upon the wider field of human discourse.

31 For more detailed analysis, see Broadhead, *The Gospel of Matthew on the Landscape of Antiquity*, 298–314.

32 Paul Armstrong, *Conflicting Readings: Variety and Validity in Interpretation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 21.

33 Armstrong, *Conflicting Readings*, 41.

34 Armstrong, *Conflicting Readings*, 20–23.

35 Armstrong, *Conflicting Readings*, 39.

A Way Forward: From a Genealogy of the Text to the Genetics of Human Discourse

What are the gospels and how do they function? Throughout the history of interpretation, the gospels have been seen as written artifacts from which to glean insights into early Christian history—whether the history of Jesus, the apostolic testimony, the primitive church and its kerygma, or the evangelists. For most interpretation, the function of the gospels reflects the message, intent, and design of an individual author and provides a mirror image of the community.

This perspective is called into question by a formalistic analysis of the morphology (what they contain) and the syntax (how they operate) of the gospels. Even the most creative reconstructions of Matthew as theologian and literary genius cannot account for the dissonance in the contours of the text. Moreover, a theory of linear development that culminates in a fixed and written artifact fails to do justice to the complex processes of literary traditions and of discourse rooted in human competencies and human communities. I would suggest a way forward by moving from the genealogy of the foundational text to the genetics of human discourse.

The gospels have been treated as fixed objects with mostly linear development. The composition, design, transmission are seen as stages in the fixing of the text. In a similar way, the approach of *Wirkungsgeschichte* (reception history) asks how a foundational text fixed by the hand of the author has been taken up in subsequent contexts and varying interpretations. The texts of the gospels have thus been seen as objects to be constructed or received.

The first step forward would involve moving from a narrow view of composition as the linear development that ends in a fixed and written text to a Tradition History characterized by the generative *mouvance* of competing traditions, dialectical exchange, reciprocal engagements. The idea of the text as a singular artifact that represents a goal achieved must give way to an awareness of the dynamic and chaotic processes of human discourse. The text is not a fixed entity that offers a window onto truth. Rather, the treasure is embodied and embedded within the extended life of the narrative, and its variable functions are better seen as qualities of its identity.

This requires more careful and specific use of terminology. New Testament scholars are notorious for their polysemic use of the term *text*. The degree of polysemy is exceeded only by the certainty with which New Testament scholars, including myself, have spoken of the text. In recent works, I have taken care to delineate what I mean when I speak of a work such as the Gospel of Matthew as a text.

The attempt to understand the Gospel of Matthew primarily through the eyes of its author is fraught with difficulty, but, more significantly, it treats the Tradition History in a utilitarian way through reductionism. The goal of reconstructing the original text and understanding the designs of its author has proven elusive and is often misdirected.

Renewed attention to the history of development for the Gospel of Matthew may prove more fruitful, and it may open new ways of understanding this gospel. The Gospel of Matthew may be seen as work or a *Tradition* that incorporates the long and diverse history of its composition and use. This *Tradition* is accessible in the form of a *Text*, though no *Text* contains or proscribes all of the *Tradition*. The *Text* of the Gospel of Matthew is found in manuscripts—documents that serve as *Scripts* for the *Performance* of the *Text*.³⁶

We have access to the Gospel of Matthew as a work or Text only through recovery and reconstruction, and our access to the text is always partial and colloquial. Let me give two examples. First, I know of no New Testament manuscript that attests the presence of Matt 28:18–20, the Great Commission, before Sinaiticus from around 350 CE. Secondly, we know the full text of the Gospel of Matthew only from the context of a four-gospel canon. If there was a foundational manuscript written under the control, intention, and design of Matthew, that text is not available to modern scholarship. From the wider field of linguistic, social, and anthropological studies there is much to suggest that no such foundational, final text ever existed.

Studies that perceive the gospels as written artifacts typically focus on the author and give little thought—mostly anecdotal—to the role of orality and communities and changing landscapes in the development and endurance of the gospels. It is increasingly clear that the gospels are less written artifacts than they are performances and reformulations in a viable, adaptive, durative, collective discourse history.

This understanding of the gospels—of what they are and how they function—moves them from the archives and places them in the mainstream of human discourse. Recent studies show that this viable, adaptive way of processing thought and language and literature has a neurological basis—it is rooted in and reflects the operations of the human brain. The hermeneutical circle so prominent in literary and philosophical studies is not an anomaly—it is rooted in and reflective of the discursive, decentered, adaptive processes of

36 On this topic, see Broadhead, *The Gospel of Matthew on the Landscape of History*, 78–84, quotation from 84.

human neurology. This neurological discourse is neither wholly determined nor wholly volitional—it is a playing out of the evolutionary, generative processes of the human genome in diverse cultural contexts across varying landscapes.

Living Traditions such as the Gospel of Matthew are participants in this wider ecosphere of human discourse. They function in a dynamic, generative, adaptive, reciprocal process rooted in the human brain and embedded in the genetic discourse of human evolution. This embodied, embedded, reciprocal engagement in the processes of human discourse is more than description or function; this participation defines their identity.

Conclusion: The *Aktionsart* of Part-Whole Engagements

One can describe the universe only by attending to its components, but its constituent parts belong to a greater whole. Individual objects can be subject to observation and analysis, but they can only be understood in relation to the greater field or system in which they participate and through which they are sustained. In the language of genetics, a phylotype can only be known in terms of a genotype. But a genotype exists only as it is expressed in phenotypes, and both the genotype and phenotype can only be understood through their participation in a phylotype.³⁷ In linguistic terms, a category such as gospel exists only as it is expressed in the distinctive operations of a particular gospel. But the genre of gospels and each of the gospels can only be understood through their participation in the wider dynamics of human discourse.

How then does one live and work in the realm of the particular with an awareness of the wider temporal and spatial universe? One way the Greeks did this was through a grammatical tool—the aorist tense. The aorist is the most frequent and the most generic of the Greek verb tenses; it is also one of the most misunderstood and misrepresented. My mentor Frank Stagg published in 1972 an article entitled “The Abused Aorist.”³⁸ Here he chastised the numerous grammars that insist the aorist is a punctiliar tense (point action). In particular, he was disgruntled with those who loaded theological significance onto

37 A genotype is the genetic constitution of an individual organism. A phenotype is the set of observable characteristics of an individual that result from the interaction of its genotype with the environment. A phylotype is the evolutionary development of a specific group of organisms.

38 Frank Stagg, “The Abused Aorist,” *JBL* (1972), 222–31.

this construction (saved once and for all, forgiven once and for all, for example). Stagg noted that the root of the term ($\alpha + \delta\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$) means “undefined.” The aorist tense, said Stagg, is frequently used to *represent* action as punctiliar, but this is not an essential trait, and certainly not a theological characteristic. The book of Revelation, for example, uses the aorist to say that the martyrs “lived and reigned a thousand years” (Rev 20:4).

This is an apt metaphor for our quest to know what the gospels are and how they function. We can only interpret the text that we have from the manuscripts available to us. The history of critical scholarship in biblical studies is built upon the mantra of *ad fontes* (back to the texts) and upon the skills of historical and linguistic analysis. Such critical studies have drawn the gospels from a naïve historicism and from the dominance of theological presuppositions into the wider academic exchange of the humanities. They have done so through the uncompromising lens of punctiliarity.³⁹

It is crucial, however, to recognize that the reconstructed text we are reading and our methodological precision isolate a freeze frame in a much larger video; this practice presents a punctiliar view of a stream of Living Tradition.⁴⁰ With Papias, the gospels were reified as fixed, foundational texts, and they were personalized and authorized around apostolic images. Thus, they were treated as written artifacts, as personal and punctiliar accounts, when in fact they are durative and collective.

We are always free to investigate particular aspects of the gospels and to delineate the fields and the means of analysis, but, in my opinion, we are never again permitted, on critical grounds, to treat the gospels, in their essence, as fixed objects or artifacts under the control of authors or interpreters. Moreover, the function of a text is not simply utilitarian; in literature as in genetics, form and function—and thus identity—are intrinsically and inescapably bound.

We may perceive of ourselves as bounded individuals looking out upon the external world; in reality we are participants in the ecosystem of the world and

39 Recent studies suggest why punctiliar perspectives and unilinear processes prove so attractive. First, they reduce the unfathomable to a graspable, workable framework. Secondly, human thinking—especially “fast thinking”—typically seeks the easiest explanation for complex issues.

40 A similar phenomenon can be seen in 2 Corinthians. Though the canonical version reads as a singular address to the church in Corinth, the letter is almost certainly a composite of several Pauline letters. These were transposed into a single letter, then added to the Pauline collection. I do not know of any New Testament scholar who gives primary attention to the editor or scribe who gathered these Pauline traditions. A similar process is at work in the Johannine materials, both inside and outside the canon.

its processes, and that ecosystem is embodied within us. We may perceive of ourselves as standing on a stable plain or plateau; in reality we stand upon the shifting crust of an orb that spins upon its axis and orbits its sun in a moving galaxy within an expanding universe. The world is not flat, and the text is not fixed. The gospels are Living Traditions operating in and reflective of the generative, adaptive processes of human discourse. This *mouvance* and viability of the gospels is both descriptive and essential; it is how they function, but it also what they are.

So What's the Story? The Role of Plot in Reading Matthew's Gospel

David L. Barr

Narrative fictions provide a sense of an ending always lacking in our real lives.

PETER BROOKS¹

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In 1965, H. B. Green observed, "That the evangelists were not compilers but authors, imposing definite literary forms on their work, is a proposition which is not yet universally accepted...."² And while we might quibble with the word "universally," the situation today is certainly very different. I count myself fortunate to have come of academic age in a time when we learned to read these ancient writings as literary compositions, not simply as resources for theology or deposits from which we might extract history.³

A Personal Preface

Having done my undergraduate work at Fort Wayne Bible College, I had considerable catching up to do in graduate school. Form and Redaction Criticisms

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- 1 Peter Brooks, "Reading for the Plot," in *Narratology*, ed. S. Onega and J. A. G. Landa (London and New York: Longman, 1996), 251–61.
 - 2 H. B. Green and C. R. Mirfield, "The Structure of St. Matthew's Gospel," *SE* 4 (1967): 47–59.
 - 3 In no small measure, my academic work has been shaped by the innovative application of literary theory developed by Alan Culpepper and the (then) young scholars who came together in the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) working group entitled, "The Literary Aspects of The Gospels and Acts" (1978–97). In addition to Alan, I am especially indebted to Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, David Rhoads, Robert M Fowler, Joanna Dewey, Jack Dean Kingsbury, Janice Capel Anderson, Norman R. Petersen, and Stephen D. Moore—several of whom are represented in this volume.

were novel and exciting methods but soon led to the even more captivating ideas of literary criticism. I remember my excitement on first reading Norman Perrin's 1972 essay endorsing the idea that the gospel writers were creative authors.⁴

My enthusiasm for this new approach was both encouraged and modeled by my doctoral mentor, Robert A. Spivey, who first taught me to see the gospels as distinct presentations of Jesus (via Redaction Criticism, as it was then called) and then helped me hear the story each told. His vision of scholarship included more than the mastery of past results and had room for creative approaches.⁵ Thus, he did not flinch when I presented him with a non-traditional dissertation proposal.

My dissertation addressed the then obscure notion of the genre of the gospels.⁶ It was not great work, but it did the trick and led to my first paper at SBL addressing the question of "What Makes a Gospel a Gospel?" (Chicago, 1975). At SBL I found there were others who were beginning to explore new literary methods for understanding the New Testament writings, especially the Gospels and Acts. The following year (1976, St. Louis) my topic was "The Drama of Matthew's Gospel," an experimental attempt to find a plot in this complicated work. After the session, a journal editor asked if he might publish it.⁷ I knew we were on to something.

In those early years, none of us quite understood what we were doing (or, if others knew, they didn't tell me), but we knew that it was interesting and that it held the potential for new insights into these writings and the communities for whom and by whom they were produced. Not all agreed. So, in part because the older members of this Society were not keen on these new methods, but mostly because we found benefit in the works of like-minded scholars, new program units were developed. Perhaps the earliest and certainly the most influential of which was "The Literary Aspects of the Gospels and Acts Group," begun in 1978.

4 Norman R. Perrin, "The Evangelist as Author: Reflection on Method in the Study and Interpretation of the Synoptic Gospels and Acts," *BR* 17 (1972): 5–18.

5 For a glimpse of his synthesis, see Robert A. Spivey and D. Moody Smith, *Anatomy of the New Testament: A Guide to Its Structure and Meaning* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), now in its 7th edition.

6 "Toward a Definition of the Gospel Genre: A Generic Analysis and Comparison of the Synoptic Gospels and the Socratic Dialogues by Means of Aristotle's Theory of Tragedy" (Ph.D. diss., The Florida State University, 1974).

7 David L. Barr, "The Drama of Matthew's Gospel: A Reconsideration of Its Structure and Purpose," *TD* 24 (1976): 349–59.

I pursued my own work on the gospels as literary compositions, intending to publish an analysis of the four canonical works. But one thing led to another, and I wound up applying literary and, more specifically, narrative methodology to the variety of writings in the New Testament.⁸ I was surprised and pleased to see what happened when the texts themselves became the object of study, rather than seeking their historical reliability or their theological teaching. Of course, to write such a work one has to teach the entire corpus. And that is how I discovered the Apocalypse of John.

I had known the Apocalypse since childhood, of course. But I had long given up on its strange and bizarre pictures of the End-Times. It seemed a story impossible to take seriously. Then something unexpected happened. As I began to apply the narratological methods learned from my colleagues in the Literary Aspects group, the story came alive.⁹ The characters became real,¹⁰ the action powerful,¹¹ and its role in the lives of real men and women became comprehensible.¹² I felt like I had kissed a frog.

As I have explored the literary characteristics of the Apocalypse, I have returned repeatedly to the work of the various members of the Literary Aspects Group, and especially to Culpepper's ground-breaking work on John's Gospel.¹³ And now I attempt the reverse move and ask if the lessons I have learned while studying the Apocalypse have anything to offer gospel studies, in particular the thorny topic that intrigued me so long ago, the plot of Matthew's Gospel.

That initial exploration of the drama of Matthew was largely a study of its structure, defending and revising Bacon's delineation of the five great speeches Matthew constructed for Jesus.¹⁴ My contribution was to see the speeches as

8 David L. Barr, *New Testament Story: An Introduction* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2009; 1st ed. 1987).

9 Eventually leading to David L. Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Salem, Ore: Polebridge Press, 2012; 1st ed. 1998).

10 David L., Barr, "Dis-Guising Jesus: St(R)Aying in Character in John's Apocalypse," in *Let the Reader Understand: Essays in Honor of Elizabeth Struthers Malbon*, ed. Edwin K. Broadhead (London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 135–44.

11 David L. Barr, "The Story John Told: Reading Revelation for Its Plot," in *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students*, ed. David L. Barr (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 11–23.

12 David L. Barr, "Blessed Are Those Who Hear: John's Apocalypse as Present Experience," in *Biblical and Humane: A Festschrift for John Priest*, ed. Linda Bennett Elder, et al. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 87–103.

13 R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

14 Barr, "Drama of Matthew's Gospel," 351–57.

links, not dividers, within the narrative—each speech clarifying the actions of the previous and subsequent narratives. Working within this structure of six narrative units linked and explained by five speeches, I tried to trace the narrative flow of the story: from Abraham (1:1) to the end of the age (28:20). At that point, I lacked the narrative tools to do more. Those tools would be developed in the Literary Aspects Group and have been applied to the question of Matthew's plot by at least eight colleagues. Before examining their individual views, it will be helpful to consider the various aspects of a plot and the different ways it is defined.

Clarifying Plot

Plot is at once both the most obvious and the most obscure of ideas. On the one hand, plot is simply what happens in the story—the flow of the narrative. On the other hand, plot refers to the way the story is told. In his extraordinary discussion of tragedy, Aristotle defined plot as “the arrangement of the incidents” (*Poetics* 1450a–1451). All stories are made of a series of incidents, but the effect of the story depends on how the incidents are arranged. Thus, in a joke the punchline must always come at the end:

I want to die quietly in my sleep, like my grandfather did. Not kicking and screaming like the other people in the car with him.

The joke would not work if we were told at the beginning that grandfather fell asleep while driving his car. The arrangement of incidents shows the storyteller's hand at work. Just as the arrangement of figures structures a painting, so the arrangement of incidents structures a narrative.¹⁵

Further, the arrangement of the incidents must be a logical one, so the earlier incidents can be seen somehow to cause later incidents. Aristotle defined this in the simplest of terms: every plot must have a beginning, middle, and end. That is to say, a logical starting place, a series of events that grow out of this beginning, each logically leading to the next, and a satisfying conclusion—a final incident that resolves the conflict set in motion by the initial incident with which the telling of the story began. When King Lear bequeaths his kingdom to his avaricious daughters, he sets in motion a series of events not resolved till nearly all are dead and the bodies carried off stage.

15 Brooks, “Reading for the Plot,” 254.

Strictly speaking, plot is not a part of the story; it is an aspect of the author's construction of the story. This distinction between what a story is and how a story is told is an important one, for which modern critics have invented a new term: discourse.¹⁶ Every narrative contains both story (what happens) and discourse (how it happens). This is analogous to the logical distinction between content and form. Plot is one aspect of how the storyteller shapes the story. Other aspects of discourse include point of view, characterization, temporal distortions, narrative interruptions, and related factors. Incidents narrated without a plot would be incomprehensible or, at most, nonsensical.¹⁷

We must be clear then that the beginning and end of the story is not the same thing as the beginning and ending of a plot. The *story* of Oedipus begins with his birth and the horrible oracle that he would murder his father, causing him to leave home—not knowing who his real parents were. The *plot* of Oedipus begins with the awful plague that has fallen on Thebes and the gradual discovery of what caused it and how it is remedied. In short, then, plot has to do with time and its distortion in the story's telling and with the logic by which the incidents of the story are arranged.¹⁸

Authors distort time in other ways that shape our reception of the story. They repeat things (either telling the same incident more than once, perhaps from different perspectives, or telling several similar incidents). They also vary the emphasis on particular incidents—telling some in sweeping summaries and others in excruciating detail. In fact, the detail can be so great that the action slows or even stops—producing what might be called a “slow-motion” effect.¹⁹ We might think of this as the pace of the telling or as the time it takes to hear or read the incident. Most incidents will be told at a seemingly natural pace (where story-time and reading-time are about the same), while others will be accelerated (where story-time is much longer than reading-time) or slowed (where reading-time is greater than story-time). All such temporal variations are important for plot.

One final caution about the arrangement of the incidents: Aristotle was talking about Greek tragedy, which portrays a highly compact action, carefully

16 The two classic works are Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980) and Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

17 Brooks, “Reading for the Plot,” 252.

18 “Arranged” also invokes a spatial dimension to plot, still evident in expressions like a plot of ground, meaning how the various parts of a garden are laid out, or the plot points of a graph. We also speak of scheming toward some goal as a plot, such as “the 9/11 plot.”

19 Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 72. I have simplified his model.

plotted. Other forms, the epic, the biography, or romance, for example, are more diffuse. They include incidents that round out the story or define the character or mimic the main action (a sub-plot). In general, we can say that the longer a story, the more likely it is to contain incidents not directly crucial to the plot. The incidents of the gospels and the Apocalypse are far more complex than Greek tragedies but far more focused than an epic.

The gospels, like the Apocalypse, contain many more incidents than are necessary for their plots. These “extra” incidents serve several functions: emphasis, characterization, clarification, rhetorical effect, audience involvement, and such. It has become common to refer to these ancillary incidents as “satellites” (a spatial metaphor) and the plot-significant incidents as “kernels” (for reasons that escape me).²⁰ The difference is that kernel incidents are crucial (in its root meaning of crossing point); omitting them would disrupt the logic of the narrative. Kernels are the forks in the road, where the action could go this way or that. Much of the discussion of the plot of Matthew has involved the identification of these kernels.

Plotting Matthew's Account

Setting up his own discussion of the plot of John's Gospel, Culpepper noted that each gospel begins and ends with different incidents, suggesting they have unique plots.²¹ Matthew, he says, traces the story of Jesus from his birth as Emmanuel to his universal authority under which his disciples seek to make disciples of all nations—showing the connections between Jesus' actions and teaching. This somewhat vague idea left plenty of work for others.

The first to argue for the importance of identifying plot in order to interpret the individual incidents of Matthew's Gospel, as far as I have found, was J. C. Fenton.²² He argued that the basic plot concerned Israel's rejection of the messiah and the consequent turning to the gentiles. The article makes a good case for the necessity of plot analysis but lacks detail and does not seem to have had much effect on later interpreters.

The first contemporary scholar to offer a plot analysis of the whole gospel seems to have been Richard Edwards, whose little book *Matthew's Story of Jesus*

²⁰ Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 53–56.

²¹ Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 84–86.

²² J. C. Fenton, “Structure and Plot in St Matthew's Gospel,” *Theology* 57, no. 403 (1954): 20–23.

consciously employs literary (more specifically Reader Response) criticism.²³ The book lacks a critical apparatus (only a two-page introduction and no notes), so it is not entirely clear what criteria he used. His presentation seems to understand plot as the “flow” of the narrative: more concerned with what comes next than with how it is shaped. Nevertheless, he offers an insightful reading of the narrative, with many observations of how one incident leads to the next. He divides the gospel into six “basic segments,” each having to do with the kingdom: Framework (1:1–4:22), Demands (4:23–7:29), Power (8:1–11:1), Response (11:2–18:35), Message (19:1–25:46), and Conflict (26:1–28:20).²⁴ Unfortunately, it is not clear why these are chosen, and the segments themselves seem to be more thematic than narrative. The book seems to have had little influence on subsequent discussions.

One reason for this lack of influence may be that soon after Edwards book was published, two scholars presented detailed and sophisticated analyses of Matthew's plot: Jack Dean Kingsbury and Frank Matera. Kingsbury presented a clear articulation of the development of the action of this gospel, which he saw as the increasingly intense conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities.²⁵ The strength of this approach is its clear concept of causality between incidents, at least at the macro-level.

More specifically, Kingsbury notices that twice in his narrative Matthew re-directs the action with the phrase, “from that time Jesus began.” (Ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς, 4:17 and 16:21). The first is from the time of John the Baptizer's arrest (after which Jesus proclaims the nearness of the kingdom); the second is from the time of Peter's recognition that Jesus is the Messiah (after which Jesus begins to foretell his death). Kingsbury suggests that these occurrences mark the Beginning (1:1–4:16), Middle (4:17–16:20), and End (16:21–28:20) episodes of the plot, which we might summarize as: Jesus' appearance sets in motion a series of encounters with the Jewish authorities that eventually culminates in his death and resurrection and the authorization of his disciples to carry on his work. It is not clear why Kingsbury ignores other verbal indications of change or just what role he assigns to the speeches. There is also the awkward fact that these same two turning points are found in Mark's Gospel.

Kingsbury's article on the plot of Matthew presents a detailed examination of the author's characterization of the Jewish leaders and the increasing ferocity of their attacks on Jesus, strengthening his reading: Matthew's “plot is one

23 Richard A. Edwards, *Matthew's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

24 Edwards, *Matthew's Story of Jesus*, 9.

25 First in his book, Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988), then in his more detailed article, “The Plot of Matthew's Story,” *Int* 46 (1992): 347–56.

of conflict, and this conflict, at the human level, is above all between Jesus and the religious authorities.”²⁶ While I have several problems with the underlying notion of the rejection of Israel, Kingsbury made important contributions with this analysis: that the plot centers on conflict, that there are turning points in the story, and that these turning points pivot on temporal markers. This is real progress.

A more determinedly literary analysis of plot, making extensive use of modern literary criticism, appeared shortly after Kingsbury’s book. Frank Matera published what remains the most detailed delineation of Matthew’s plot.²⁷ Focused on an Aristotelian understanding of plot as particular incidents bound together by cause and effect, Matera presented what he saw as the crucial incidents of Matthew’s story: Jesus’ Birth, Jesus’ Ministry, The Question of Messiah, Recognition of Jesus as Messiah, Cleansing of the Temple, and The Great Commission. These are the kernels of the action, the posts on which the fence of the narrative is strung. Each (except the last) is surrounded by a constellation of satellites that round out, interpret, and complete the action. This produces a narrative comprised of six narrative “blocks” each with a specific plot-significant (kernel) incident:

The Coming of the Messiah (1:1–4:11). Kernel: Birth of Jesus (2:1a).

The Messiah’s Ministry to Israel (4:12–11:1). Kernel: The Beginning of Jesus’ Ministry (4:12–17).

The Crisis in Messiah’s Ministry (11:2–16:12). Kernel: John’s Question (11:2–6).

The Messiah’s Journey to Jerusalem (16:13–20:34). Kernel: Recognition (16:13–28).

The Messiah’s Death and Resurrection (21:1–28:15). Kernel: Temple Cleansing (21:1–17).

The Great Commission (28:16–20). Kernel: Same.

Remarkably, this produces an overall plot very similar to Kingsbury’s: a “story whose plot concerns Israel’s rejection of the Messiah and the consequent movement of the gospel to the gentiles.”²⁸ While there is much to criticize here, including the quasi-allegorical reading of Matthew as history, Matera set the agenda and a high standard of analysis of Matthew as a narrative.

26 Kingsbury, “Plot,” 355.

27 Frank J. Matera, “The Plot of Matthew’s Gospel,” *CBQ* 49 (1987): 233–53.

28 Matera, “Plot,” 252–53.

Warren Carter has adopted Matera's scheme, with a critique and a few refinements.²⁹ He argues that the first kernel is not the passing reference to Jesus' birth (2:1a), as Matera suggested, but the larger incident of divine intervention (1:18–25). So too, the next axial incident is not Jesus' withdrawal to Galilee (4:12–17) but his calling of disciples (4:17–25). He accepts Matera's identification of the third kernel as John's question from prison (11:2–6). The fourth kernel is not Peter's confession but rather the new teaching about suffering (16:21–28 not 16:13–28). He agrees that the fifth kernel is the Temple Cleansing (21:1–17) but argues that the final kernel is not the Great Commission (28:16–20) but the appearance of the risen Jesus to the women (28:1–10).

Both Matera and Carter have presented cogent readings of Matthew's plot; their differences are more of emphasis than substance. For Matera, the story explains the gentile mission; for Carter, the story explains the meaning of Jesus' resurrection, which entails the gentile mission. I suspect that others using the same methodology could construct similar chains of events.

The work of Edwards, Kingsbury, and Matera was taken up, criticized, and consolidated by Mark Allan Powell.³⁰ He accepts Edwards' notion of plot as narrative flow and commends him for showing that Matthew's narrative makes sense as a whole story. But the most that can be said is that this is a possible reading. Matera improved on the analysis with a detailed argument concerning plot as causality—seeking a narrative logic that leads to the particular end portrayed by Matthew. Powell criticizes this strategy of starting at the ending and asking what caused this end; he argues that Matthew's use of the paradigm of promise and fulfillment works the other way: the ending is not caused by the events; the events are necessitated by the ending (190–91). Powell also criticizes Matera's assumptions that the last incident is necessarily the end and that a story has only one plot. He concludes that Kingsbury is closer to the mark with his analysis of the role of conflict in Matthew: Jesus' conflict with the Jewish leaders and his conflict with the disciples. Thus, one should not seek one storyline. Matthew can be read as the story of Jesus, the story of Israel's religious leaders, and the story of the disciples.³¹

Powell proceeds to offer "additional observations" regarding Matthew's plot. Combining Edwards' notion of narrative flow with Kingsbury's observation of explicit changes in the action (at 4:17 and 16:21; see above), he argues that Matthew focuses on Jesus' teaching and his death (which are also the

29 Warren Carter, "Kernels and Narrative Blocks: The Structure of Matthew's Gospel," *CBQ* 54 (1992): 463–81.

30 Mark Allan Powell, "The Plot and Subplots of Matthew's Gospel," *NTS* 38 (1992): 187–204.

31 Powell, "Plot," 193.

segments of the story in which story time slows and reading time increases).³² He then makes a rather strange argument for neglecting logical causation for “teleological” causation, namely because the author understands Jesus’ death to be for the forgiveness of sins.³³ Thus, the passion narrative, not the Great Commission, is the end to which the story moves. The story is not about how the gospel passed from Israel to the gentiles (as both Matera and Kingsbury suggest) but about how Jesus saves his people.³⁴

Powell accepts Kingsbury’s analysis of the importance of the conflictual nature of the plot but argues that the conflicts between Jesus and the Jewish leaders and Jesus and the disciples reveal a deeper conflict between God and Satan.³⁵ Thus Matthew is best read as a story with (at least?) three plots. The main plot is the conflict between God and Satan, which is dramatized with two subplots: the attempt of the Jewish leaders to silence Jesus by killing him and the attempt of the disciples to keep Jesus from dying. And since Jesus must die to save his people, opposing that is to be on Satan’s side (16:21–23).

Powell’s approach seems to have been well-received, and it offers several improvements over previous work, including its emphasis on the importance of Jesus’ death. Its notion of multiple plot lines is worth exploring. It also avoids the implicit imperialism often connected to the promise-fulfillment paradigm. Still, I am uneasy with the notion of a plot and two subplots; ordinarily a subplot is an echo or foreshadowing of the main plot, as Gloucester’s family tragedy echoes and clarifies that of King Lear.³⁶ In Matthew, the fate of John the Baptizer represents an actual subplot. So too, the use of the idea of teleology and promise-fulfillment seem somewhat foreign to plot analysis—more at home in the field of theology. I would rather explore the significance of such correlations in terms of flashback and foreshadowing and the temporal distortion such moves produce. Another commendable aspect of Powell’s analysis is the open-ended ending he proposes: the plots of conflict with the disciples and with the authorities are yet to be resolved.³⁷

One of the earliest, and also more recent, analyses of Matthew’s plot stands somewhat outside the trajectory sketched above. Janice Capel Anderson

32 Powell, “Plot,” 194.

33 Powell, “Plot,” 195–96.

34 Powell, “Plot,” 196.

35 Powell, “Plot,” 198. This idea is pursued more fully by Robert Charles Branden, *Satanic Conflict and the Plot of Matthew* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), who sees Matthew as an apocalyptic scribe.

36 John Dover Wilson, *King Lear* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), xxxiii–xlili.

37 Powell, “Plot,” 204.

finished her dissertation in 1985 (the same year as Edwards' *Story*) but revised and published it in 1994 (after the work of Kingsbury, Matera, and Powell).³⁸ It is by far the most intriguing and nuanced analysis of Matthew's narrative technique. She devotes separate chapters to narrative rhetoric, point of view, character, and plot. While most critics are at pains to incorporate the diverse incidents of the gospel into a coherent unity, Anderson strives to make sense of all the repetitions and redundancies in the story. Repeated words, repeated summaries, even repeated stories appear "over, and over, and over again" (her subtitle). She is the only one to take seriously the oral/aural experience of the ancient audience, and repeatedly asks what impression the narrative as told would make on the audience.

Anderson poses two plot-types that provide the framework for Matthew's story: biography and journey.³⁹ The movement of the story from birth to death is organized by geography as Jesus travels from Judea to Galilee to Judea again, with a postmortem return to Galilee. This is not very helpful. What Matthew reveals of Jesus' life between birth and death is rather minimal, and his journey is hardly a heroic quest. Her second suggestion is somewhat better, viewing the plot in terms of conflict, climax, and dénouement. As various groups seek to hinder or assist Jesus, the story creates suspense in the implied reader as to who will succeed and how the conflict will be resolved. But she suggests that the dénouement does not finish the story; instead of closing down, the plot opens to further anticipation as a result of the final commission to the disciples.

The real strength of her work lies in the detailed analysis of plotting devices used to tell the story: summary passages, anticipation and retrospection (dreams, scriptural fulfillments, passion-resurrection predictions), the Johannine subplot, and double and triple stories. She lists nine summary passages, all but one associated with Jesus' movements, and several corresponding to other verbal markers of the structure of the text. Their chief function "is to emphasize repeatedly that crowds follow Jesus wherever he goes, seeking healing, which he provides."⁴⁰ Anticipation and retrospection (sometimes called foreshadowing and flashbacks) correspond somewhat to what others have called the promise-fulfillment model. Thus, Judas's betrayal is both predicted

38 Janice Capel Anderson, "Over and Over and Over Again: Studies in Matthean Repetition" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1985); and *Matthew's Narrative Web: Over, and Over, and Over Again*, JSNTSup 91 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994). All page references below are to the published version.

39 Anderson, *Matthew's Narrative Web*, 144.

40 Anderson, *Matthew's Narrative Web*, 149.

(foreshadowed) and enacted, in somewhat the same way that Scripture is used to foreshadow Jesus' actions that are then enacted in the story. She pays particular attention to dreams, which are used to anticipate the future at least six times in the story. These dreams function to show the divine providence that superintends the story. In a similar way, three predictions of Jesus' coming death and resurrection, each more specific and detailed, foreshadow future events and prepare the reader for the surprising events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection.

Powell had suggested that such predictions eliminate suspense from the story, but Anderson argues that there are two kinds of suspense: suspense of uncertainty and suspense of anticipation. This is a useful caveat, quite in keeping with the ancient world. The audience viewing the Oedipus tragedy, for example, knew how it was going to end; the drama was how the playwright brought that end about. So too, the implied reader of Matthew is assured that certain events will happen, but the how, why, and when are left uncertain.⁴¹ And the fact that some predicted events have come to pass within the narration enables the audience to imagine that those predicted but not narrated will occur. In a similar way, the incidents connected with the life of John the Baptizer form a subplot, so that "John is the foreshadower as well as the forerunner of Jesus."⁴²

Her attentive and detailed exploration of the double-stories is impossible to re-create here. Not only the similarities and differences but also their places in the narrative shape the reader's response to their events. Anderson imagines a plot mechanism that is far more complicated and far more dynamic than that of simple cause-and-effect. She aims to show that Matthew's narrative is not linear; it is multilinear. Her chosen metaphor is the spider's web, where one strand is linked to another in an artistic way capable of causing insight on the part of the reader. It is a masterful work.

The final two works I will discuss show how important the notion of plot has become, for each uses plot as a way to understand other aspects of Matthew's Gospel. Andries van Aarde utilizes the works of Kingsbury and Powell on Matthew's plot but comes to different conclusions.⁴³ Like Powell, he takes the beginning plot incident to be the introduction of Jesus as the one who would

41 Comparable, perhaps, to watching a recorded tennis match that you know Roger Federer will win, even though he is down a break in the third set.

42 Anderson, *Matthew's Narrative Web*, 172.

43 A. G. Van Aarde, "Jesus' Mission to All Israel Emplotted in Matthew's Story," *Neot* 41 (2007): 416–36.

save God's people (1:21).⁴⁴ Thus, the birth of Jesus is an integral part of the history of Israel, traced in the opening genealogy and leading to the gathering of disciples. The middle of the narrative—what might be called a “life of Jesus”—stretches from this initial proclamation of God's kingdom to the final proclamation of the kingdom's arrival (4:23–25:46).⁴⁵ The end or conclusion comes in the events connected with his death and resurrection, especially the commissioning of the disciples to carry on his mission (26:1–28:20).⁴⁶

The logic by which the audience is moved from incident to incident is neither a straight-line cause-and-effect nor a realization of the promise and fulfillment, according to van Aarde. Instead, Matthew has provided us with an interlocking and interacting series of narrative events and speech events, wherein the content of the speeches both interprets the previous action and prepares the reader for the following.⁴⁷ Thus, the Sermon on the Mount defines righteousness and interprets both prior events of Jesus' obedient actions and subsequent events demonstrating the power of that righteousness. It clarifies both who Jesus is in the earlier narrative and why he undertakes the task of healing the sick in the subsequent narrative. These events then prepare the reader for the next speech, in which the disciples are commissioned to share in Jesus' mission.⁴⁸

Van Aarde too sees two subplots, but not based on conflicts. Rather, “the analogy between the two subplots can be understood by means of the ‘transparency’ concept: the pre-Easter narration (level one) can be seen in the story of the post-Easter faith community (level two) and vice versa.”⁴⁹ By transparency, he seems to mean pattern, or overlay, or some such. The shift between these two times (the time of Jesus and the time of the audience) is narrated in the events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus—including the tearing of the Temple veil and the resurrection of the dead, both of which portend the arrival of the new age. This analysis leads him to the conclusion that both the “history” of Jesus and the “history” of the church “are included in Israel's history.”⁵⁰ In this, then, he disagrees with both Kingsbury and Powell.

Van Aarde is one of the few to take seriously those huge blocks of material wherein action pauses and one listens to Jesus speak, surely one of the

44 Van Aarde, “Jesus' Mission,” 425.

45 Van Aarde, “Jesus' Mission,” 429.

46 Van Aarde, “Jesus' Mission,” 429.

47 This is very close to my own early view in “Drama of Matthew's Gospel.”

48 Van Aarde does not trace the rest of the narrative with this same care.

49 Van Aarde, “Jesus' Mission,” 431.

50 Van Aarde, “Jesus' Mission,” 432.

hallmarks of Matthew's narration. But, while I think there is much to be learned by attention to the content of the speeches, his approach (like mine earlier) is too cerebral to provide a sense of the plot. In addition, his portrayal of a two-level story seems more an assertion than a demonstration.

The most recent consideration of Matthew's plot I have seen also seeks to use plot analysis for a non-literary goal. Cedric E. W. Vine works with Powell's delineation of the plot as a series of conflicts.⁵¹ Since he is interested in the audience of Matthew, he chooses to focus on what Powell calls the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders.⁵² More specifically, he wants to show that Matthew is addressed to a "local audience" (engaged in coming to terms with the destruction of the Temple and the formation of Rabbinic Judaism) and not simply to some general Christian community.

Matthew begins by introducing Jesus as the one who will save his people from their sins, as Powell maintained. The weakness of Powell's analysis, in Vine's view, is the failure to define precisely what Matthew means by *salvation* and by *his people*. The introduction of Jesus is carefully plotted so that the audience sees Jesus' true identity far more fully than anyone in the story. Jesus' messianic destiny is first asserted by the narrator (1:1), then by an angel (1:20; and again at 2:13), by the chief priests and scribes, based on the Torah (2:3–6), by John the Baptizer (3:13–14), and finally by the voice from heaven (3:17). The arrival of such a person disrupts the present order, as seen in Herod's response to the news and in John's description of the Pharisees and Sadducees as a "brood of vipers" (3:7). This disruption persists to the crucifixion, when the scribes and elders ironically assert the meaning of Jesus' death, "He saved others; he cannot save himself" (27:42). They view Jesus' death as necessary to preserve Israel (and their leadership); Jesus views it as a necessary obedience to God; the disciples view it as bewildering and even impossible; the audience—aware of Jesus' role in preserving God's people since the opening genealogy—understands more.

Because the audience knows so much—including the repeated forecasts of Jesus' death in Jerusalem—there is little suspense in the story.⁵³ We should not, then, expect a strict pattern of causality between events. Vine takes Powell's notion of promise and fulfilment to be a better model. He also endorses Anderson's plot types (biography and journey types), which he thinks provide the basic framework for the story.

51 Cedric E. W. Vine, *The Audience of Matthew: An Appraisal of the Local Audience Thesis* (London & New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014).

52 Vine, *Audience of Matthew*, 53.

53 Vine, *Audience of Matthew*, 56.

Vine's purpose in analyzing the plot of Matthew is to respond to those who would use the gospel to imagine the audience—the historical audience not the implied audience. Some think that audience is represented in the story by the disciples or the crowds. Since the audience knows the whole story, has witnessed every action of Jesus, has listened to every word he speaks, scholars should be more cautious in identifying the community with any character in the story.⁵⁴ This is good advice, but those of us who take the literary character of the gospels seriously find the project even more problematic.

A Personal Response

As an outsider to this discussion, I would offer a few concluding remarks. First and foremost, this brief history of the pursuit of Matthew's plot convinces me that we have made great strides in clarifying how this gospel works. There is general agreement that Matthew's plot consists of a string of related episodes, largely seen to be related by cause and effect. But what is meant by cause and effect differs from scholar to scholar. Powell, for example, sees promise-fulfillment as the primary engine of the plot. I find this unconvincing and prefer Anderson's categories of foreshadowing and flashback. Kingsbury's identification of two turning points in the plot seems sound, though they are probably not the only such turning points. Both Matera and Carter have presented interesting readings of plot events driven by cause and effect.

There is as yet no agreement on how one might state the plot on the seemingly simple paradigm of beginning-middle-end. In fact, different scholars seem to mean different things by these terms. Matera and Powell, for example, do not agree on what is the end of the plot, whether it be the commissioning of the disciples or the death of Jesus. Kingsbury and van Aarde both have rather expansive notions of the beginning and end. Powell's suggestion of multiple storylines is worth pursuing, but I'm not sure that they should be thought of as plots and subplots but rather as other ways to read story. Only Anderson attempts to explain what the ancillary episodes do for the story, and only she takes account of the oral nature of the narrative. Both are important topics for further research. Also, her notion of a "suspense of anticipation" is a valuable contribution to understanding how the story of Matthew works.

This review of the topic also convinces me that there is no such thing as *THE* plot of Matthew's Gospel. That plot seems more multilinear than linear, more like a spider's web than a fence row. But then, I am convinced that plot is both

54 Vine, *Audience of Matthew*, 78.

an invention of the writer and an invention of the reader. We do not simply discover plots; we help invent them. We are, I think, a little naïve if we imagine we can reconstruct the author's carefully plotted work so that it can be read in only one way. My work on the Apocalypse convinces me that literary works, including ancient ones, can be—indeed, should be—read in more than one way, depending on the work and depending on the reader.

In fact, I've come to wonder why we want to know the plot of the story anyway. Perhaps so we can see new things in the story. Perhaps so we can tell the story better. Perhaps so that we can better understand those for whom and by whom these stories were written. Or perhaps it is so we can tame the story, conforming it to our own preconceptions of what it means. There seems to be an assumption that knowing the plot of Matthew reveals the meaning of Matthew's Gospel. A doubtful proposition. I am somewhat surprised at how many interpreters think that discovering the plot somehow validates some view of the world outside the story. My work with the Apocalypse convinces me that those readers who attempt to find a direct correlation between the characters or events of a narrative and those of the real world often fail to hear the story.

Rather than closing a story down by showing how it "ought" to be read, our task as narrative critics is to open up the story to other readers and other readings. Rather like Matthew's final scene, we ask the reader to imagine what must happen now. As one narrator explained, "I did not begin the story in order to end it; the essence of the tale lay in the telling. 'What happened next' I could answer, but 'what happened in the end?' I could not even understand."⁵⁵

And finally, I think it is safe to say that the idea that the gospel writers were authors is now widely (if not universally) accepted. Even scholars primarily interested in their history or social setting or ideology find it essential to address the literary nature of the gospels. Even more important, critical analysis of the "literary aspects of the Gospels and Acts" has opened up these ancient writing to a more nuanced understanding of their actions, a clearer grasp of their characters, a fuller appreciation of their authors, and a glimpse of their roles in the lives of those by whom and for whom they were written.

55 Ved Vyas, the narrator, in *The Great Indian Novel*, by Shashi Tharoor (New York: Arcade, 1989), 162.

Jesus was a Refugee: Reception of Matthew 2:13–23

Janice Capel Anderson

A child Messiah who was a refugee himself, who therefore knows the depths of despair refugees face, has deep theological significance and inspires hope for refugees.

ZHODI ANGAMI¹

...

This ever-escalating situation, with the constantly swelling wave of refugees, increases the responsibility of those of us who are still blessed to live in peace and some comfort, in order not to remain insensitive to the daily drama of thousands of our fellow human beings. Instead, we are called to express our practical solidarity and love, knowing that every gesture of love toward them is ultimately attributed to the newborn and incarnate Son of God, who came to the world neither as king and ruler, nor as tyrant or aristocrat, but rather as a naked and defenseless Infant in a tiny manger, homeless like many thousands of people at this very moment, and forced from his earliest years to migrate to a distant land in order to survive the hatred of Herod. The innocent blood of today's refugee infants spills onto the earth and into the sea, while Herod's insecure soul "bears the guilt."

This divine Infant, born in Bethlehem and headed to Egypt, is the authentic guardian of today's refugees, who are persecuted by modern-day Herods. This Child Jesus, our God, "became weak to the weak" (cf. 1 Cor 9:22), in every way becoming like us who are weak, wearied, at risk, as refugees. Our support and assistance to the persecuted and displaced, irrespective of race, ethnicity and religion, resembles the most precious gifts of the wise men to the newborn Lord, like the invaluable treasures of "gold and frankincense and myrrh" (cf. Matt 2:11), an inviolable and

¹ Zhodi Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God: A Tribal Reading of the Birth of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017), 229.

permanent spiritual wealth that remains incorrupt to the ages and awaits us in the heavenly kingdom.

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW²

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The words of Zhodi Angami and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew highlight readings of Matt 2:13–23, the flight to Egypt and the return to Nazareth, with strong resonance for refugees and those called to support them. This resonance speaks to the importance of the contexts of interpreters as they receive and activate biblical texts. It speaks to the importance of reception. In this essay I begin with a brief narrative analysis of 2:13–23. Second, I review the intertextual echoes modern critics hear as well as two modern empire critical responses. I turn then to how some readers filled and fill a gap in the narrative between the Holy Family's flight to Egypt and their return. I touch on some of the rich traditions associated with their journey and time in Egypt, including stories, art, and pilgrimage. Finally, I explore the recent contextual North East Indian tribal reading of Zhodi Angami.

I dedicate this essay to Alan Culpepper. He was a valued colleague and leader in the Society of Biblical Literature's Literary Aspects of the Gospels and Acts Group, whose members contributed to a revitalization of gospel scholarship at the end of the twentieth century. He was quick to support women and younger colleagues and to acknowledge their work. He also taught me to ask an important question: How do we explain not only how readers end up with different readings of a text, but also how they end up with similar readings? I have often puzzled over that question. It deserves serious methodological and theological reflection. Reception history provides fodder for that reflection. Given recent events, the reception history of Matthew 2:13–23 deserves attention. It is also far deeper and more extensive than this essay can cover. I hope to encourage others to explore further.

² Excerpt from the "Patriarchal Proclamation of Christmas 2015—Christmas Encyclical," Ecumenical Patriarchate. https://www.patriarchate.org/patriarchal-documents/-/asset_publisher/2lzbCNORLysD/content/patriarchike-apodeixis-epi-tois-christougennois-2015-?inheritRedirect=false.

A Narrative Critical Reading of Matthew 2:13–23

The genealogy and infancy narrative of Matthew 1–2 and the passages from Jesus' death to the Great Commission frame the central section of the Gospel of Matthew. Along with the genealogy, the infancy narrative establishes Jesus' identity and sets the stage for the rest of the gospel. Five dreams (four of these revelations to Joseph) and five fulfillment quotations reinforced by repetition structure and shape the episodes.³ These episodes establish Jesus' birth and early life as divinely guided and as the fulfillment of prophecy. Among other identity markers, Jesus is Emmanuel, the savior Jesus, the Messiah, the shepherd ruler of the people of Israel, God's son called out of Egypt, and a Nazorean. In addition to establishing Jesus' identity, the antagonism between elite leaders and the child Jesus in the narrative foreshadows later plot developments. The narrative creates dramatic irony as two levels coexist. On one level King Herod, a Roman client, holds sway and forces the child and his family to flee for refuge. On another, the child Jesus is the true king deserving of worship.⁴

Turning to the flight to Egypt itself, 2:13–15 follows the magi's worship of the child and departure, warned not to return to Herod. The warning to Joseph to flee is vivid. The narrator commands the narratee to "See." The narratee experiences an angel of the Lord appearing to Joseph in a dream, echoing Joseph's dream experience in 1:20. The angel "appears" in the historical present. This aligns the temporal as well as visual and auditory perspectives of the narrator, the narratee (and likely many readers), and Joseph. The narratee hears along with Joseph the command to take the child and his mother and flee into Egypt.⁵ Joseph is to remain there until the angel tells him the coast is clear because King Herod will seek to destroy the child. The narrator describes Joseph immediately obeying in words that echo the angel's charge. The family leaves "by night," perhaps stressing the need for secrecy and immediate action. The narrator punctuates this with the fulfillment quotation from Hosea 11:1, a direct narratorial comment guiding the response of hearers and readers. Herod

3 Janice Capel Anderson, *Matthew's Narrative Web* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 152–57.

4 Dorothy Jean Weaver, *The Irony of Power: The Politics of God within Matthew's Narrative* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017), 30–34, 130–31. However, Weaver's slippage from the Jewish elite to the Jewish people in discussing the magi on 132 is problematic.

5 See Anderson, *Matthew's Narrative Web*, 155, and Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 222. Angami stresses the vividness of the text. The phrase, "the child and his mother" rather than "your wife and son," stresses Jesus' conception through the Holy Spirit and Mary's disruption of patriarchal patterns. Chrysostom notes the phrase in *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*. VIII.4. *NPNF Series 1*. Vol.10, 52.

has already been portrayed as frightened and manipulative, albeit powerful. In 2:16–18, his calculated slaughter of all the male children two years old and younger in Bethlehem seals his portrayal as an evil king, threatened by the birth of the child Jesus. The slaughter provides an interlude between the flight to Egypt and the family's return, but its focus is on Herod's actions rather than events in the life of Jesus' family. The narrator again punctuates and interprets this episode by a fulfillment quotation, here from Jer 31:15. When Herod dies, foreshadowed in 2:15 and repeated in 2:19–20, the angel of the Lord appears again in a dream to Joseph and echoes the original command in reverse. Again, the narratee hears the angel's command and again Joseph obeys in words that echo the angel's command. In Israel, another dream warns Joseph to avoid Herod's son, and so to make his home in Galilee, in Nazareth. Joseph, as the child's adoptive father, is thus portrayed as an obedient agent of God, protecting the child and his mother from Herod and his son Archelaus. Yet again, the narrator provides a fulfillment quotation. This time, with a general reference to prophets, it justifies the move to Nazareth. The episodes are tied to key geographic locations where the experiences of the characters are set and through which the narrative traces the movements of the characters.

The settings of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Egypt, the land of Israel, Galilee, and Nazareth are not developed, but likely have symbolic significance that depends on hearer/reader associations. Jerusalem and Galilee gain resonance from their reappearance later in the gospel. Jerusalem here foreshadows opposition and danger to Jesus, especially from the Jerusalem elite. Galilee is a safe haven and may be associated with the Gentiles (Matt 4:15). Egypt is both a place of refuge and the land out of which the people of Israel and Jesus are called to the land of Israel. Nazareth is an obscure village, whose name calls forth diverse interpretations often related to its sound when voiced.⁶

Flesh and blood hearers and readers who align themselves with the narratee experience the impact of the narrative's elements, including settings, fulfillment quotations, dialog, plot, perspective, development of characters, and the like. Much depends, however, on connections they make or associations they bring to the narrative.

6 See Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, New Updated ed., ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 209–13, and Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 254–59.

Modern Critical Readers: Intertextual Echoes

Readers reading with a historical-critical or other modern critical lens no less than others experience the impact of the narrative's elements and make connections. Research and teaching often involve close and extensive reading of the Jewish Bible and the New Testament. This, along with proficiency in using search tools, lends itself to hearing/finding intertextual echoes. Critics have been particularly keen to identify the significance of the Matthean fulfillment quotations as well as other echoes of scripture and tradition in the birth narrative.⁷ They have searched for possible allusions as diligently as the magi searched for the newborn king. For some this is a search for authorial intention. Donald A. Hagner, for example, writes, "Clearly, Matthew has in mind the story of Moses as he narrates the story of Jesus: Herod is the antitype of Pharaoh; Jesus is the antitype of Moses."⁸ Although authorial intention is a notoriously slippery notion, the slaughter of the innocents underlining the royal threats to Jesus and Moses seems a safe association to make in a gospel thick with fulfillment quotations and allusions to Jewish scripture and tradition. Similarly, the strong word-for-word ties between Exod 4:19–20 and Matt 2:20 stand out.⁹ In Exod 4, however, the Lord tells Moses to go back to Egypt after those who sought his life were dead. He places his wife and sons on a donkey, whence may come some of the later imagery of Mary and the child on a donkey or ass. Whether we can know what Matthew intended or not, interpreters do make the connections to Moses and assume his first audiences did as well.

For many the goal is to uncover the associations Matthew's first audiences may have made. Ulrich Luz, for example, writes of the fulfillment quotation of verse 15, "The readers can fill it with meaning here only on the basis of their traditional Jewish knowledge. Either they remember that in the Bible Israel is God's son (Exod 4:22 and often) whom God has called out of Egypt (Hos 11:1), and they connect the Son title with a point of Israel typology. The Exodus from Egypt is repeated and fulfilled in Jesus. Or they remember that the Son

7 Matthean commentaries cover this in detail, including W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*. vol. 1, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, WBC 33a (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). In addition, Dale C. Allison, *A New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), and Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, cover intertextual associations extensively.

8 Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 34.

9 For example, Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 126.

of David, the Messiah, will be God's son on David's throne."¹⁰ Or, one might add, both. Critics "remember" both possibilities and, therefore, suggest—not unreasonably—both as possibilities for the first audiences.

Another major association, in addition to the Exodus, Moses, and Son of David, that modern critics often draw is to the Exile(s), a major time demarcation in the genealogy. The fulfillment quotation in 2:17–18 of Jer 31:15 evokes in scholars' minds either the Assyrian or Babylonian exiles or some combination of the two. Rachel mourns the slaughtered children from near Bethlehem (wherever the exact location of her burial) as she did those on their way to exile.¹¹ The import of reading Jeremiah together with Matthew is that just as God defeated the oppressors in the Exodus and Exile, so Herod will be defeated as well—although the slaughter of the innocents without divine intervention is a hard pill to swallow.¹²

There are a great many other links that critics forge as well in their reception. Some are disputed, such as the degree to which one should associate Joseph with the patriarch Joseph interpreting dreams and finding refuge in Egypt or Jacob fleeing Laban.¹³ Others find broader agreement. For example, many point out that Egypt is often a place of refuge in the Jewish tradition (1 Kgs

10 Luz, *Matthew* 1–7, 120–21.

11 Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 205–206, 216–17, and Elaine M. Wainwright, *Shall We Look for Another?: A Feminist Rereading of the Matthean Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 64–66.

12 Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 216–17. Wainwright in *Shall We Look for Another?* reads Rachel as standing in for the mothers of the slaughtered as well as for God's compassion, 64–65. Luz, *Matthew* 1–7, 121–22, notes that later tradition interprets the children as martyrs. See also John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke*. vol. 1, trans. A. W. Morrison, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries (Edinburgh: St Andrews Press, 1972, repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 103, and Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 125. Eugene Eung-chun Park, "Rachel's Cry for Her Children: Matthew's Treatment of the Infanticide by Herod," *CBQ* 75 (2013): 473–85 reads with an anti-imperial lens and finds an intratextual as well as intertextual echoes. Martin O'Kane, "The Flight into Egypt: Icon of Refuge for the H(a)unted," in *Borders, Boundaries and the Bible*, ed. Martin O'Kane (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 15–60, also emphasizes the dual motifs of Exodus and Exile on 24–27. There he notes that for Matthew the center is Israel, and Egypt and Exile are the periphery, whereas this may not have been the case for subsequent readers.

13 See e.g., R. Alan Culpepper, "Fulfillment of Scripture and Jesus' Teachings in Matthew," *In die Skriflig* 49 (2015): Art.#1986, 3, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v49i2.1986>, Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 224, and Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 216, 544–45.

11:40; Jer 26:21; Josephus *Ant* 12.387; etc.) as well as a site of oppression.¹⁴ The associations are keys to scholarly reception. This is the case whether Matthew consciously or unconsciously intended them or whether members of his first audiences were likely to have drawn the same connections.

Modern Critical Readers: Imperial Context

In recent years, scholars have paid increasing attention to the Roman imperial context of the New Testament, including the Matthean infancy narrative. This has been spurred by analysis of modern colonialism and its aftermath as well as the effects of globalization. Recent innovative scholarship focused on the Roman empire outside biblical studies has also played a role. Scholars have described Matthew as both resisting and reinforcing imperial ideology in the first and sometimes in later centuries.¹⁵ One of the first empire critical scholars to focus extensively on the Matthean birth narrative was Richard Horsley. In *The Liberation of Christmas: The Infancy Narratives in Social Context*, he argues that scholars have tended to downplay the political and accent the theological and apologetic in Matthew's birth narrative.¹⁶ He stresses that Herod is a Roman client-king and details Herod's economic exploitation and brutality.¹⁷ He argues that the first-century Jerusalem high priestly families were also Roman client-rulers oppressing the general Jewish population. They no more

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- 14 See, e.g., Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 121, 121 n. 154, and Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 83, for example.
 - 15 For a map of postcolonial studies and the New Testament see Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 3–23, and Moore, “Paul after Empire,” in *The Colonized Apostle*, ed. Christopher D. Stanley (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 9–23. Moore notes that the “X and Empire” approach, which he calls empire studies, dominates in New Testament scholarship (2011: 22). For postcolonial studies and Matthew see Fernando F. Segovia, “Postcolonial Criticism and the Gospel of Matthew,” in *Methods for Matthew*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 194–237, and Warren Carter, “An Imperial-Critical Reading of Matthew,” in *An Introduction to Empire in the New Testament*, ed. Adam Winn, SBLRBS 84 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 71–90.
 - 16 Richard A. Horsley, *The Liberation of Christmas: The Infancy Narratives in Social Context* (New York: Continuum 1989, repr., Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 5–8. Cf. Elaine M. Wainwright with Robert J. Myles and Carlos Olivares, *Matthew: An Introduction and Study Guide: The Basileia of the Heavens is Near at Hand*, T&T Clark's Study Guides to the New Testament (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014, repr. 2017), 33.
 - 17 Horsley, *Liberation of Christmas*, 39–49.

represent Judaism generally than the magi simply represent Gentiles.¹⁸ For Horsley, the magi as Persian royal advisors represent conflict between Rome and the East.¹⁹ The flight into Egypt, Horsley argues, reflects political conditions in Palestine. He writes, “The Roman and Herodian troops would have created refugees, often hundreds and thousands at once, virtually every time they took military action to maintain or reassert their domination in a given area.”²⁰ In exploring modern applications, Horsley looks for “dynamic” analogies.²¹ In terms of the flight into Egypt, he writes, “Thus, for example, the hundreds of thousands of Central American refugees in the United States might have an analogue in the flight of the Christ-child and parents to Egypt, especially considering the similar causes of their flight (repression by client regimes threatened by nascent liberation movements).”²² Horsley’s focus is on resisting ancient and modern imperial ideology rather than on how Matthew might reinforce it. His attention to ancient and modern empire is but one example of many such recent scholarly readings.

Shively T. J. Smith’s recent womanist interpretation of Matt 2:13–23, “One More Time with Assata on My Mind,” like Horsley’s, also focuses on the first-century Roman imperial world as well as reading with a modern analogue.²³ Smith reads Matthew in dialogue with the narrative of Assata Shakur, a black woman activist who escaped a U.S. prison in 1979 and fled to Cuba.²⁴ Smith reverses the hermeneutical flow, however.²⁵ Her reflections on how Cuba might be viewed from one perspective as the site of oppression and from another as a place of refuge lead her to examine how Egypt might also be read differently. She explores in detail perceptions of Egypt in the latter part of the

18 Horsley, *Liberation of Christmas*, 39–40, 50–58.

19 Horsley, *Liberation of Christmas*, 39–40, 50–58.

20 Horsley, *Liberation of Christmas*, 72.

21 Horsley, *Liberation of Christmas*, 157–158.

22 Horsley, *Liberation of Christmas*, 158.

23 Shively T. J. Smith, “One More Time with Assata on My Mind: A Womanist Rereading of the Escape to Egypt (Matt 2:13–23) in Dialogue with an African American Woman Fugitive Narrative,” in *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, eds. Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace, SBLSS 85 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 138–63.

24 Smith, “One More Time with Assata on My Mind,” 141–43. Assata Shakur remains a controversial figure to the present day. She is currently on the FBI’s list of most wanted terrorists (https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/wanted_terrorists/joanne-deborah-chesimard).

25 Larry J. Kreitzer introduces the idea of reversing the hermeneutical flow in *The New Testament in Fiction and Film: On Reversing the Hermeneutical Flow* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

first century.²⁶ She finds a great deal of ambivalence. For the Romans, Egypt is home to luxury and a rich cultural heritage, a land of mystery as well as a “breadbasket,” but also a difficult province to control.²⁷ For Jews, Egypt was a site of refuge with an established Jewish community that welcomed new members. However, Smith points out, Philo describes an “anti-Jewish pogrom” in Alexandria and antipathy towards the community by both Greek elite and indigenous Egyptians.²⁸ Nonetheless, reading Matt 2:13–23 along with Shakur’s autobiographical account leads Smith to highlight Matthew’s depiction of Egypt as a safe haven and Judea as the dangerous place where Herod, the Roman client-king, brutalizes the innocent.²⁹ She holds that, “The correlation between Shakur’s Cuba and Matthew’s Egypt suggest[s] that the references to ‘Egypt’ in Matt 2:13–23 carry more cultural weight and historical significance than typically acknowledged.”³⁰ Reflecting on Egypt and Cuba also draws attention to linguistic, economic, and cultural differences refugees may have to negotiate. She suggests, however, that a move of Jewish refugees from Judea to Egypt in the first century would have required less adjustment than Shakur’s move to Cuba.³¹ Theologically, Smith argues, focusing on Egypt as a real place presents Jesus’ world as “transnational and transcultural in which the presence of God is portable, accompanying and guiding Jesus’ family as they journey (Matt 1:23; 18:20; 28:20).”³² For Smith, as a womanist, reading the Bible and African American women’s experiences together is essential, revealing in this case relationships “between people and land, both ancient and contemporary.”³³ Egypt as a real place, reading texts and landscapes together, and exploring how readers have filled in a narrative gap is our next stop on a journey of reception of the flight into Egypt.

26 Smith, “One More Time with Assata on My Mind,” 143–49.

27 Smith, “One More Time with Assata on My Mind,” 145–46, 149.

28 Smith, “One More Time with Assata on My Mind,” 146–48.

29 Smith, “One More Time with Assata on My Mind,” 151–56.

30 Smith, “One More Time with Assata on My Mind,” 152.

31 Smith, “One More Time with Assata on My Mind,” 154–56. She is attentive to similarities and differences.

32 Smith, “One More Time with Assata on My Mind,” 156. This comment is the sort of point that Musa W. Dube finds potentially problematic in *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 138–144.

33 Smith, “One More Time with Assata on My Mind,” 140.

What Happened in Egypt?

In the narrative critical reading above, we noticed a gap between the flight to Egypt and the return, filled only by the slaughter of the innocents. Matthew does not follow Joseph, the child, and his mother to Egypt. This gap has played a major role in reception history. Scriptural midrash, apocryphal literature, homilies, pilgrimage practices, and art have filled it. This is true not only, but especially, in Egypt where for centuries and still today pilgrims visit sites associated with the Holy Family.³⁴ Stephen J. Davis suggests that ancient and medieval readers read both Scripture and the Egyptian landscape to construct the Holy Family's experiences.³⁵ One of the key Scriptural passages used was Isa 19, especially 19:1, a passage with ongoing significance for Coptic Christians.³⁶ In the Septuagint, 19:1 reads: "An oracle concerning Egypt. Behold, the Lord sits on a light cloud (νεφέλη κοῦφη) and shall come to Egypt; the idols of Egypt shall shake at his presence and their heart shall be defeated within them."³⁷ Eusebius of Caesarea, the early church historian, in his *Proof of the Gospel* (circa 314 CE) reads Matt 2 with Isa 19:1–4:

But I contend that it can only be understood consistently, of the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ to men. For He, being Word of God and Power of God, fulfilled the aforesaid prediction both literally and metaphorically, visiting the land of the Egyptians on a light cloud. The name, "light cloud," is allegorically given to the visitation He made by means of the Body, which He took of the Virgin and the Holy Spirit, as the Hebrew original and Aquila clearly suggests, when he says, "Behold the Lord rides on light thickness, and comes to Egypt," naming the body that came from the Holy Spirit, "light thickness." And surely this part of the prophecy was literally fulfilled, when the Angel of the Lord

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- 34 See Agenzia Fides "AFRICA/EGYPT—UNESCO will proclaim the 'Path of the Holy Family' World Heritage of Humanity," 17 May 2017, <http://www.fides.org/en/news/62294#.Wa85a8aQxaS>. See also, *Be Thou There: The Holy Family's Journey in Egypt*, ed. Gawdat Gabra (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001). For an analysis of pilgrimage practices with extensive notes see Stephen J. Davis, *Coptic Christology in Practice: Incarnation and Divine Participation in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 125–52. DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199258628.001.0001.
 - 35 Davis, *Coptic Christology*, 126. My analysis is much indebted to Davis, *Coptic Christology* and Davis, "Ancient Sources for the Coptic Tradition," in *Be Thou There*, 133–62.
 - 36 Davis, *Coptic Christology*, 127, and Cornelius Hulsman, "Tracing the Route of the Holy Family Today," in *Be Thou There*, 31.
 - 37 Translation of Davis, *Coptic Christology*, 127.

appeared in a dream to Joseph and said: "Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and stay there until I tell thee." For then, the Lord God the Word, uniting with the child's growth, and present in the Flesh that had been furnished Him of the Holy Virgin, visited the land of the Egyptians. (His flesh was "thick" as representing bodily substance, "light" again through its being better than ours, and it is called "a light cloud" because it was not formed of the sensuous passions of corruption, but of the Holy Spirit.) But the cause of His journey thither is as follows. When it is remembered that the first origin of idolatrous error was in Egypt, and the Egyptians seemed to be the most superstitious of men, and bitter enemies of the people of God and as far removed from the prophets as possible, we can see why the Power of God came to them first of all. And therefore the word of Gospel teaching has waxed stronger among the Egyptians than among any other men.³⁸

The flight to Egypt fulfills Isaiah and emphasizes the virgin birth, the incarnation, and the need of the Egyptians. Eusebius also explains that demons "inhabiting images" were "tossed to and fro" and defeated by and conquered by Christ.³⁹ Davis suggests that Eusebius' own flight as a refugee from Caesarea to upper Egypt due to the Roman emperor Diocletian's persecutions in 310 may have influenced his interpretation.⁴⁰

Athanasius of Alexandria, about twenty years after Eusebius, takes up similar themes. In *On the Incarnation of the Word* 33, 36, and 37, Athanasius picks up the motifs of the flight to Egypt, incarnation, and the falling down of idols, citing Isa 19:1 and Hos 11:1.⁴¹ From these early midrashic interpretations, we can begin to see how stories of the Holy Family's flight and activities emerge. One early pilgrimage account, *A History of the Monks in Egypt* (circa 400 CE), describes pilgrims being shown ruins of a temple where idols fell down when

38 Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel, being the Demonstratio evangelica of Eusebius of Caesarea*, vol. II, trans. William John Ferrar (London: SPCK; New York: Macmillan, 1920), Bk. 6. Ch. 20, p. 38, <https://archive.org/stream/proofofgospelbeiozeuseuoft#page/38/mode/2up>.

39 Eusebius, *Proof*, 6.20, p. 39.

40 Davis, "Ancient Sources for the Coptic Tradition," 137. Davis notes that we cannot be sure whether Eusebius uses a source or offers his own interpretation.

41 Davis, *Coptic Christology*, 130–31. See Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei: Athanasius On the Incarnation of the Word of God*, trans. T. Herbert Bindley, 2nd ed. (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1903). <https://books.google.com/books?id=gJAwAQAAIAAJ&pg=PA1#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

the Holy Family came to Hermopolis.⁴² Similarly, the fifth-century historian Sozomen writes about a tree, which bowed down in worship when the Holy Family came to the same place. Its leaves and twigs provide healing. He speculates that the tree worshipped by pagans had had a demon that was expelled at the presence of Christ as Isaiah foretold the idols would be shaken.⁴³ In both cases we see the presence of the Holy Family foreshadowing later Christian displacement of earlier traditions.⁴⁴

Another dramatic story comes from the *Vision of Theophilus*, an account of a revelation about the Holy Family's experiences circa the sixth to eighth century.⁴⁵ Moses, a relative of Joseph, learns that Herod has sent soldiers to kill the family. He travels to Qosqām to warn them. Miraculously, he arrives in three days. Mary cries out in anguish and weeps in fear. The child Jesus comforts her. Jesus promises Moses to bring him into his kingdom, but because of the fear Moses caused, he is to lie down with his head on a rock and die. Joseph buries Moses.⁴⁶ The story explains Moses' burial site in the wall of the church, which is also a shrine for pilgrims.⁴⁷

Davis suggests that interpreters read Scripture, tradition, and the built and natural landscape of Egypt together. At many sites pilgrims connected to passages from scripture as well as narratives about what the Holy Family had done at a site. The land became sacred ground. Pilgrims could walk where the family walked and even touch a stone handprint or footprint of the Christ child.⁴⁸ Various homilies and paintings encouraged and reinforced transformative experiences. Pilgrims imitated Christ, and these experiences mediated the power of the incarnation itself and continue to do so for Coptic Christians today.⁴⁹

42 Davis, *Coptic Christology*, 132.

43 Davis, *Coptic Christology*, 132–33; see also Davis, “Ancient Sources for the Coptic Tradition,” 140–41.

44 See Davis, *Coptic Christology*, 133–34. He notes “anti-pagan” activity in Egypt “at the end of the fourth and the first half of the fifth century” (133). Sheila Schwartz, “The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight to Egypt” (PhD diss., New York University, 1975), 16–17 and 17 n.22, notes that the images of the Flight “were understood to allude to the triumph of Christianity over paganism” (17), and this was reinforced by the story of the fall of idols in art and literature.

45 Davis, *Coptic Christology*, 135–36.

46 Alphonse Mingana, trans., “Vision of Theophilus,” *Woodbrooke Studies* 3 (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1931), 30–34, https://archive.org/stream/woodbrookestudie03theouoft/woodbrookestudie03theouoft_djvu.txt.

47 Davis, “Ancient Sources for the Coptic Tradition,” 146.

48 Davis, *Coptic Christology*, 133–47.

49 Davis, *Coptic Christology*, 145–46. For modern traditions at various sites and photographs, see Hulsman, “Tracing the Route of the Holy Family Today,” 31–131.

A rich reception fills the Matthean gap between the flight to Egypt and the family's return. It resonates with the Matthean emphasis on Jesus as the fulfillment of Scripture and Emmanuel. It also supplements the narrative's focus on Joseph with a focus on Mary.

A rich reception also took place in Europe. While only a few European pilgrims could travel to Egyptian sites in late antiquity and the medieval period, stories about the experiences of the Holy Family as they fled Herod and while in Egypt appeared in Europe especially via Pseudo-Matthew and the Arabic Infancy Gospel.⁵⁰ Pseudo-Matthew, written in Latin, may date to the eighth or ninth century.⁵¹ It includes many traditions found in the Proto-Evangelium of James and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, but also unique material associated with the flight to Egypt.⁵² Some of these stories are similar to those in Coptic tradition; others are not. Among the most striking are 18 and 19, where Jesus must assuage his parents' fears of wild creatures. In 18, dragons worship Jesus in fulfillment of Ps 148:7. In 19, lions and panthers worship Jesus, wagging their tails and leading the family to Egypt. They and other wild beasts, including wolves, harm neither the family nor the family's sheep and rams, fulfilling Isa 65:25 (cf. Isa 11:6–8). In 20, Mary is tired from the hot journey. She rests in the shade of a palm tree and wishes for its fruit high in the tree. Joseph wishes for water. The child Jesus causes the tree to bend down and provide fruit as well as for a spring to flow at its roots.

These and other stories of the flight and time in Egypt inspired much European art. Martin O'Kane discusses this art in "The Flight into Egypt: Icon of Refuge for the H(a)unted." One aspect of his analysis is particularly striking when read along with Coptic traditions. He explains that medieval (and some later) depictions of the Matthean and various apocryphal episodes of the flight to Egypt provided opportunities for European believers to engage in a sort of mental pilgrimage. He cites Pseudo-Bonaventure's *Meditations on the Life of Christ* (fourteenth century) as inspiring such mental pilgrimage as well as Gerard David's two paintings of the flight circa 1510 CE.⁵³ Pseudo-Bonaventure instructs believers to accompany the Holy Family:

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- 50 For details of manuscripts and translated excerpts see J. K. Elliott, ed. and trans, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 84–107, and Oscar Cullmann, "Later Infancy Gospels," *New Testament Apocrypha*. Vol. 1. Rev. ed., ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. R. McL. Wilson (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox. 1991), 456–69.
- 51 Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 86.
- 52 Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 85–86.
- 53 Martin O'Kane, "The Flight into Egypt: Icon of Refuge for the H(a)unted," 40–44. For further discussion of the flight in art see Peter and Linda Murray and Tom Devonshire Jones, "Egypt, Flight into, and Return from Egypt" in *The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Art and Architecture*, 2nd ed., ed. Tom Devonshire Jones (Oxford: Oxford: Oxford University Press,

Jesus was carried to Egypt by the very young and tender mother, and by the aged saintly Saint Joseph, along wild roads, obscure rocky and difficult, through woods and uninhabited places—a very long journey. They are said to have gone by the way of the desert which the children traversed and in which they stayed for 40 years. Where did they rest and spend the night? Have pity on them. Accompany them and help to carry the child Jesus and serve them in every way you can. Here there comes a compassionate meditation. Make careful note of the following things[;] do they live or did they beg? You must contemplate all these things. Enlarge on them as you please. Be a child with the child Jesus! Do not disdain humble things for they yield devotion, increase love, excite fervour and raise hope.⁵⁴

For O’Kane, medieval and later artists encouraged viewers to reflect on the slaughter of the innocents and the flight as a literal and allegorical experience of exile that might strengthen faith. Like the traditions associated with Coptic pilgrimage sites, the Matthean and apocryphal texts and art based upon them took a cue from a tapestry of biblical allusions. Compassion for the human plight of the refugee Holy Family mingles with the miraculous in the texts and responses to them.

Pseudo-Bonaventure’s meditation was not unique. Other meditations on the flight into Egypt, some utilizing extracanonical traditions and some simply reflecting on the difficulty of the flight, developed in various contexts in medieval Europe and continue worldwide today.⁵⁵ The Roman Catholic devotion

2013), 170–71, and David R. Cartledge and J. K. Elliott, *Art and the Christian Apocrypha* (London: Routledge, 2001), 98–106, and Schwartz, “The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight to Egypt.”

54 Pseudo-Bonaventure as quoted in O’Kane, “The Flight into Egypt,” 40–41. O’Kane cites I. Ragusa and R. B. Green, eds., *Meditations on the Life of Christ: an illustrated manuscript of the fourteenth century*, trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), which has a longer version of the passage on 68–72. There are many manuscripts of the widely used and translated *Meditations*. Its authorship is disputed. Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 95–115, suggests an earlier manuscript, likely written by a nun, was redacted and expanded.

55 See the section on the flight to Egypt as the second of Mary’s seven sorrows in Saint Alfonso Maria de Liguori, *The Glories of Mary* (New York: Edward Dunigan and Brother, 1852). This is an English translation from the eighteenth-century Italian with the translator’s name not given. St. Alfonso quotes [Pseudo] Bonaventure briefly in the devotion on the flight, 548. There have been many subsequent editions in various languages. See also Anselm of Canterbury’s late eleventh-century fifteenth meditation in *St. Anselm’s*

of the Seven Sorrows of Mary developed in the medieval period, for example, includes the Flight into Egypt as the second sorrow for meditation and prayer.⁵⁶ Carol Schuler argues that identification with the sufferings of a mother for her child increased empathy and helped to “bridge the gulf” between the divine and the human.⁵⁷ Of course, identification with suffering—especially that of mothers—has its dangers as well. Art in various media encouraged and reinforced devotion and identification.⁵⁸

Strikingly, the flight into Egypt became such a strong subject of Western art that Marc Chagall could adapt its symbolism to address the twentieth-century plight of Jewish refugees. One example is his *Harlequin Family/Flight into Egypt* of 1942–43. Ziva Amishai-Maisels describes the imagery: “the mother and child ride out of the deserted snow-covered village on the traditional, albeit blue, ass, with ‘Joseph,’—the Harlequin—perched precariously behind them.”⁵⁹ Similar images appear in many of Chagall’s paintings.⁶⁰ The theme of the flight resonated with his own experience as a refugee and the plight of

Book of Meditations and Prayers, trans. M. R. (London: Burns and Gates, 1872), <https://archive.org/details/saintanselmsbookooanseuoft>. Anselm’s meditation no. 78, on the flight to Egypt, mentions the apocryphal tale of bandits, where a thief who dies alongside Jesus first meets him as a child, 202–203. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 242–47, creates a modern analysis and reflection.

- 56 For discussion of the development of the seven sorrows tradition, see, e.g., Susie Speakman Sutch and Anne-Laure Van Bruaene, “The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin Mary: Devotional Communication and Politics in the Burgundian-Habsburg Low Countries, C. 1490–1520,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 61 (2010): 252–78, and Carol M. Schuler, “The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin: Popular Culture and Cultic Imagery in Pre-Reformation Europe,” *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* (1992): 5–28. A recent pamphlet to aid in Seven Sorrows meditation is Kevin O’Neil, *The Seven Sorrows of Mary* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2008). The Feast of the Seven Sorrows of Mary is today celebrated on September 15th (“Marian Feasts,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., vol. 9 (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 157–59, *World History in Context*.
- 57 Schuler, “The Seven Sorrows,” 11. She also notes that the Seven Sorrows devotion was used for political ends, 17–28.
- 58 See Schuler, “The Seven Sorrows” and O’Kane, “The Flight into Egypt” for many examples.
- 59 Ziva Amishai-Maisels, “The Artist as Refugee,” in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry: VI: Art and Its Uses: The Visual Image and Its Uses: The Visual Image and Modern Jewish Society*, eds. Ezra Mendelsohn and Richard I. Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 114. O’Kane, “The Flight into Egypt,” 49–57, discusses Chagall, relying on Amishai-Maisels in part.
- 60 Amishai-Maisels, “The Artist as Refugee,” 113–17, and O’Kane, “The Flight into Egypt,” 49–57.

many other Jews.⁶¹ As Amishai-Maisels explains, “Chagall attempted to call the Christian world’s attention to the plight of the Jews in Europe by addressing them in their own visual language.”⁶²

Tribal Contextual Interpretation

With the discussion of how Chagall read the flight into Egypt in and for his own context, I turn to a very recent, extended contextual reading of the flight into Egypt. In *Tribals, Empire, and God: A Tribal Reading of the Birth of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel*, Zhodi Angami engages in “a conversation between Western biblical methods of interpretation and tribal concerns.”⁶³ He “employs contextual reader-response criticism to read Matthew’s infancy narrative from the perspective of tribal communities of North East India.”⁶⁴ His implied reader is “a conflation of the actual reader—the one who is studying available data, making selections, applying literary devices and giving shape to the interpretation of the text—and the hypothetical ideal reader presupposed by the text.”⁶⁵ “Reading consciously as a tribal,” Angami opens new interpretive possibilities and makes the text come alive.⁶⁶ He finds many points of contact between the Roman imperial context of Matthew and the “political subjugation” of North East Indian tribes and their life on the margins, reading Matthew as a “counter-narrative” to empire.⁶⁷ He fruitfully interweaves literary and social analysis of the first-century Matthean infancy narrative and the tribal worldview.

In his chapter on Matthew 2:13–23: “The Refugee Messiah,” Angami explains that tribal peoples in North East India “have first-hand knowledge of refugees and immigrants and the problems they face.”⁶⁸ The tribes themselves are ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse.⁶⁹ First Britain and then India colonized them.⁷⁰ Many trace their origins to ancestors who migrated to the area or were brought to it by the British as laborers in the nineteenth century.⁷¹ To add

61 Amishai-Maisels, “The Artist as Refugee,” 117.

62 Amishai-Maisels, “The Artist as Refugee,” 114.

63 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, x.

64 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, x.

65 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 261.

66 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 261.

67 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, xi.

68 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 226.

69 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 7–8.

70 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 8–9.

71 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 226–27.

complexity to an already difficult situation, Angami explains that migrant laborers now come from various parts of India to the North East.⁷² There are also internally displaced tribal communities as well as refugees and immigrants from neighboring countries, including tribal people fleeing persecution in Bangladesh.⁷³ Angami describes the region as facing major challenges. Tribals, he explains, “are particularly aware of the sort of political suppression and socio-religious persecution that make families and communities leave hearth and home and seek refuge elsewhere, away from their country of birth.”⁷⁴ “Thus,” he writes, “for the tribal reader, the situation of the family of the child Messiah would be seen not simply as the consequence of a king who wanted to safeguard his throne, but also as a reflection of the system of oppression carried out by an imperial power.”⁷⁵ Herod’s brutality, including the slaughter of the innocents, is something tribal readers understand. Angami compares it to events in North East India, including an incident in 1987 in the village of Oinam and surrounding villages that is a symbol of many such events involving churches being taken over and turned into “detention centres and torture chambers.”⁷⁶ He compares a song of lament over the Oinam incident influenced by Ps 137 to Rachel’s lament in Matthew.⁷⁷

God’s protection of the Holy Family and the death of Herod, however, also offer hope and the promise that ultimately God is in control. The “vision-dream[s]” of Joseph with the appearance of an angel are divine interventions in the narrative, and tribal readers familiar with vision-dreams and messenger beings would recognize them as such.⁷⁸ Egypt provides refuge until Herod’s death, which allows Joseph, the child, and his mother to survive and to fulfill the prophetic calling of the son out of Egypt.⁷⁹ They return to the land of Israel and eventually to Nazareth in Galilee, fulfilling yet another prophecy. The prophecy that Jesus would be called a Nazorean has been a puzzle for scholars. Angami rehearses suggested solutions.⁸⁰ Influenced by tribal experience, he opts for the solution that Nazorean is an insulting name, which “brings together the concept of the Messiah who is despised together with the concept of the

72 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 228.

73 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 228–29, 264.

74 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 229.

75 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 229.

76 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 237–38.

77 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 238, cf. 265.

78 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 222–23.

79 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 231–32.

80 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 254–59.

hidden Messiah who appears unexpectedly.”⁸¹ Just as Nazareth was unimportant and obscure, so are tribal areas whose inhabitants are called derogatory names and shamed.⁸² Jesus as a refugee and a Nazorean offers hope to the marginal, including those forced to flee.⁸³ This solution and Angami’s overall reading provide new insights into the narrative for both tribal and non-tribal readers. They also prove compelling for those who experience suffering and those who are called to respond.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this essay, I recalled a question that Alan Culpepper taught me to ask: How do we explain not only how readers end up with different readings of a text, but also how they end up with similar readings? I pretend no definitive answer to that thorny question. The roles of text, first audiences, implied readers, and actual readers are much debated. In terms of the flight to Egypt, however, I have some tentative reflections. While readers and hearers’ interpretations reflect their own individual, scholarly, and community contexts and experiences, there are elements that stand out in more than one interpretation. Among others these include God’s protection of the Holy Family, identification with their plight, Egypt as refuge and place of exile, suffering at the hands of a Roman client-king, incarnation, and eventual vindication along with ancient and modern analogues. The text recounts the forced flight of a newborn child and a mother who has recently given birth along with a tyrant’s slaughter of innocent children.⁸⁴ This would engage any hearer or reader with even a modicum of imagination and compassion. For those for whom the episodes echo and resonate with biblical texts and other individual or communal experiences of suffering and exile, this engagement is powerful, leading to similar but not identical interpretations. In our current time of unimaginable numbers of refugees and many forms of despair, the story of the flight to Egypt and the voices of its interpreters have much to say, even as they have over the centuries. They offer both some cautionary tales and words of hope.

81 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 258.

82 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 258.

83 Angami, *Tribals, Empire, and God*, 259.

84 Calvin, *A Harmony*, vol. 1, in reflecting on the time of departure, thinks it “likely that the Lord spared Mary until she had gained strength after childbirth, to be able to make the journey” (99).

Gospel of Mark



Mark: John's Photographic Negative

C. Clifton Black

Clement of Alexandria (155–215 CE) and other elders of the ancient church reckoned that “John, last of all, aware that the bodily facts [*ta sōmatika*] [of Jesus] had been set forth in [Mark and] the other Gospels, was urged on by his disciples, and divinely moved by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel [*pneumatikon euangelion*]” (Eusebius, *H.E.* 6.14.7). One can understand such an interpretation: the Synoptics record nothing like John's claim, “It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (6:63, NRSV here and throughout; cf. 3:34). In John, Jesus is the Spirit's unique dispenser, because he comes from heaven in a manner unprecedented in the Synoptics: “I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me” (6:38; cf. 3:31; 6:51). Even so, Clement and his predecessors knew that the Holy Spirit is present in the Synoptics (Matt 1:18, 20; 4:1; 12:32; Mark 3:29; Luke 1:35, 41, 67; 4:1; 10:21, among others), and the Johannine Jesus is bodily enough to weep (John 11:35), be troubled (12:27; 13:21), and die (19:30).¹ Broadly serviceable, Clement's appraisal lacks precision.

Having devoted much of his career to unraveling the relationship between John and the Synoptics, D. Moody Smith (1931–2016) concluded, “John clarifies or makes explicit what is implicit or inchoate in the other Gospels or elsewhere in the New Testament.”² Supporting Smith's judgment is the Q-aphorism in Luke 10:22 (= Matt 11:27): “All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (cf. John 3:35; 6:44; 8:19b; 14:7a). While agreeing that John invites construal alongside the Synoptics, I have grown less sure that Mark is more Christologically rudimentary than John or is as exactly implicative of the Fourth Gospel as Smith supposes. Instead, Mark's theology impresses me as an inverted doppelgänger of John's. The metaphor that seems most apt is drawn from the science of photography: although both Gospels capture the same subject, Jesus, John

1 See Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

2 D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, NTT (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 64.

presents the darker areas lighter; Mark, the lighter areas darker. That is the thesis I intend to test, with concluding reflections on its theological consequences. The whole is offered to Alan Culpepper: friend, collaborator, venerated scholar, and a churchman who has dedicated his life to the education of theological students.

Two Narrative Frameworks

Let us begin by comparing items of John's narrative framework (a–f) with those of Mark (a'–f').

(a) John's prologue is the overture that announces many of this Gospel's major themes: the incarnation of the divine Logos in Jesus Christ (1:1–4, 14a, 17; cf. 17:3; 20:31). Jesus is the true light that irradiates a darkened and recalcitrant world that was created through him (1:5, 9–10; cf. 3:19; 8:12; 12:46), the fullness of grace and truth (1:14, 17; cf. 8:40, 45–46; 14:6), the unique prism through which God may be seen (1:18; cf. 6:46; 14:9), the reflector of glory "as of the only Son of the Father" (1:14b; cf. 8:54; 13:32; 17:5, 24), the enactment of God's will (1:13; cf. 4:34; 5:30; 6:39–40), and the empowerment of believers to become children of God (1:12; cf. 6:29, 40, 69; 11:25–26, 52; 12:36; 14:1, 11; 17:20–21; 20:31).

(b) John the baptizer (1:6–8, 15) serves chiefly to bear witness against himself and for Jesus: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (3:30; cf. 1:19–35; 3:25–29; 5:33).

(c) Punctuated by three trips to Jerusalem (2:13; 6:4; 11:55), the first half of John's narrative exhibits a regular pattern: an encounter with Jesus, sometimes, though not always, provoked by a mighty work (3:1–15; 4:7–12; 5:1–9a; 6:1–15, 22–24; 9:1–8; 10:22–24; 12:20–22), excites extended debate with a heavily monological Jesus (3:16–21; 4:14–38; 5:9b–47; 6:25–65; 9:9–10:18; 10:25–39; 12:23–50). In the raising of Lazarus, conversation (11:1–42) precedes miracle (11:43–44).

(d) Following a lengthy farewell to and prayer for his disciples (13:1–17:26).

(e) the passion narrative unfolds with Jesus' arrest (18:1–11), interrogations (18:12–14; 18:33–19:11), crucifixion (19:17–27), death, and burial (19:28–42). Over all of these circumstances Jesus presides masterfully, as he predicted: "No one takes [my life] from me ... I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father" (10:18).

(f) John ends with four appearances of the risen Jesus: to Mary Magdalene (20:1–18), most of his disciples (20:19–23), Thomas (20:24–29), and many of his disciples by the Sea of Tiberias (21:1–23).

Mark turns inside out most of John's storyline. (a') The Second Evangelist's incipit (1:1) is terse—"The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"³—and its scriptural epigraph (1:2–3/Exod 23:20a; Mal 3:1a; Isa 40:3) is equivocal. Precisely who are "my messenger" (Jesus or John) and "the Lord" (God or Jesus)? What does it mean to ascribe messiahship or sonship to Jesus? Apart from the baptizer's assurance that his successor will baptize with the Holy Spirit⁴ and a celestial announcement that Jesus is well pleasing to God (1:11), these questions are not clearly answered. From Mark the reader receives only faint clues about Jesus' identity and mission. John spells out everything, upfront, withholding little of significance. The reader of the prologue knows almost as much about Jesus as Jesus will later say of himself.⁵

(b') In Mark, the baptizer acclaims Jesus without naming him (1:4–8); after baptizing him (1:9), John's role is to foreshadow Jesus' arrest and execution (1:14a; 6:14–29). In the Fourth Gospel John's arrest is mentioned in passing (3:24), his baptism of Jesus is intimated, not narrated (1:32), and his testimonies to Jesus go on and on (1:15, 26–36; 3:25–30; 5:33; 10:41).

(c') John's typical arrangement of healing/controversy/Christological disquisition is missing from Mark. Its few approximations are tightly compressed (Mark 2:1–12; 3:1–6) or radically redesigned: thus, in 7:31–37 Jesus' healing evokes astonished approbation, which he attempts to silence. The most characteristic healings in Mark, exorcism of unclean spirits (1:21; 3:11; 5:1–20; 6:7; 7:24–30; 9:14–29), are altogether absent from the Fourth Gospel, though John reports others' accusations of *Jesus* as having a demon (7:20; 8:48–49, 52; 10:20). Healings of the lame and blind are the only therapeutic overlaps between

3 If, as a number of ancient witnesses attest, "Son of God" was absent from the original manuscript, then Mark's incipit is even more succinct.

4 The reference is metaphorical, since in Mark neither Jesus nor his disciples baptize anyone. In 10:38–39 Jesus mentions a seemingly sinister baptism he and his followers must undergo. John 4:1–3 is more straightforward but in its own way oblique: "Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, 'Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John'—although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized—he left Judea and started back to Galilee."

5 Almost, though not quite everything: *ho logos*, for instance, appears as an appellation for Jesus only in 1:1–18. Nevertheless, "The prologue offers a breathtaking vista of God's work in the world from the beginning of time to the full realization of God's purposes" (R. Alan Culpepper, "The Prologue as Theological Prolegomenon to the Gospel of John," in *The Prologue of the Gospel of John: Literary, Theological, and Philosophical Contexts: Papers Read at the Colloquium Ioanneum* 2013, ed. R. Alan Culpepper, Udo Schnelle, and Jan G. van der Watt, WUNT 359 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016], 3–26, quotation from 24).

Mark and John, recounted in tales that do not tally (Mark 2:1–12; 8:22–26; 10:46–52; John 5:1–12; 9:1–41). The most astounding of Jesus' miracles in John, which precipitates the plot for his execution, is the raising of Lazarus (11:1–53). Its closest analogue in Mark is the raising of Jairus' daughter (5:35–43), which ends on an offbeat (5:43) that Jesus himself downplays: "Why your racket and crying? The little girl isn't dead but only sleeping" (5:39, author's translation; cf. John 11:11–14). In Mark, Jesus' ransacking of the temple (11:15–19) during a single visit to Jerusalem (11:1) provokes his final confrontation with the Jewish officials (11:27–12:27; 14:1–2). In John (2:13–22) the temple episode *inaugurates* Jesus' hostilities with "the Jews."

(d') Jesus' *Abschiedsrede* in Mark (13:1–37) is a mere breath beside the long-winded Farewell Discourse and priestly prayer in John (13:31–17:26). Even though both prepare the disciples for tribulation (Mark 13:8–23; John 15:18–19; 16:2–3, 20–22, 32–33), Mark highlights the unknowability of the climactic hour (*hē hōra*: 13:7–8, 32–37) even as John contends, "The hour is coming, indeed it has come" (16:32; also 16:2, 4, 25; 17:1). Mark (13:11) brushes lightly over the Holy Spirit; John (14:16–17, 25–26; 15:26–27; 16:7–15) expatiates on the Paraclete. The Second Gospel stresses endurance (13:9–13, 18–20, 28–31), which the Fourth implies (18:19); love (13:34–35; 14:21–24; 15:9–17; 17:26) and joy (15:11; 16:22–24; 17:13), the Johannine Jesus' admonition and promise, are absent from Mark 13.⁶ Mark encourages readers to hold fast for a decisive event that, for John, has already come in Jesus.⁷

(e') Because the subject remains the same as in John, Mark narrates Jesus' arrest (14:43–53), trials (14:55–65; 15:1–15), execution (15:21–38), death (15:39–41), and burial (15:42–47). Jesus' demeanor in Mark, however, reverses that in John: he is not a victor but a victim, who says little (Mark 14:48–59, 62; 15:2, 34) or nothing (14:60–61a; 15:5).

(f') John presents four scenes of the risen Christ. The earliest manuscripts of Mark present none.

Amid such a blizzard of parallel details it is easy to lose one's focus. To reiterate what I see: John's narrative is no more "spiritual" than Mark's is "bodily." Neither does John draw to the surface what Mark has submerged. At

6 "Love" (*agapaō*) appears only four times in Mark (12:30–31, 33), all in references to Deut 6:4–5 and Lev 19:18. "Joy" (*hē chara*) occurs only once (Mark 4:16), with an ambivalent intimation.

7 Paul W. Meyer: "[In John] eschatology has been replaced by *protology*. Jesus stands in no need of an eschatological vindication. He does not need to come again 'in power.' He is 'right' because God is 'the Father who has sent me'" ("The Father': The Presentation of God in the Fourth Gospel," in *Exploring the Gospel of John in Honor of D. Moody Smith*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996], 255–73, quotation from 265).

fundamental points, whether by accident or by design, the outer surface of John's plotline is turned inward in Mark, and vice versa. For further clarification of this phenomenon we proceed to the central subject of both Gospels.⁸

Two Presentations of Jesus

In both John and Mark, Jesus is a baffling figure, but the bewilderment cuts in reverse fields.

Comportment

John uninhibitedly portrays Jesus as a regal figure. As early as 1:49 a disciple says of him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"—an exclamation repeated by the great crowd upon Jesus' climactic entry into Jerusalem (12:13). Far from repudiating such acclamations, he exhorts Nathanael to watch for things even greater (1:50), and the narrator confirms Jesus' royalty (12:14–15) by way of scripture (Zech 9:9). After feeding a multitude with paltry resources (6:1–14), they were "about to come and take him by force to make him king"

8 My ankle feels the caress of a bear-trap's clamps. It is a good question whether "the central subject" of any New Testament document is Jesus or God: the very caution issued years ago by Nils A. Dahl when noting that God is "The Neglected Factor in New Testament Theology" (originally published in 1975; reprinted in *Jesus the Christ: The Historical Origins of Christological Doctrine*, ed. Donald H. Juel [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991], 153–63). Limited space precludes my giving this subject its due in the present essay. If Marianne Meye Thompson is correct, as I believe she is, that John "always directs its readers' attention to God" (*The God of the Gospel of John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 239), then surely the same may be said of Mark (see Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Mark's Jesus: Characterization as Narrative Christology* [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009]). Yet the differences between these Gospels' theologies, strictly speaking, are genuine. In John, "[Jesus'] nature is ... never understood until his origin and destiny with God is truly comprehended" (Smith, "The Presentation of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel," in Smith, *Johannine Christianity: Essays on Its Setting, Sources, and Theology* [Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1984], 236). Jesus' nature vis-à-vis God, with which so much of John is preoccupied, is a rare question in Mark (2:7; 4:41; 14:61; cf. 6:48–50) and never actually debated. Mark's forty-eight occurrences of *ho theos* are unique in the New Testament because they predicate almost nothing about God (the exceptions being 9:37, 11:25, and 12:27). In Mark, controversies are driven, not by the veracity and import of Jesus' claims to be "the Son sent by the Father" but over his reliability as an index to "the kingdom of God," which he proclaims and instantiates. The character of that kingdom intersects with "eternal life" (Mark 10:17, 30; cf. John 3:15 and 39 other occurrences): both imply a quality of life, appropriable by believers, structured in accordance with God's own values. Predictably John's predications about "life" tend to revolve around belief in Jesus as such, in a manner muted by Mark.

(6:15). Mary of Bethany extravagantly perfumes and anoints his feet (12:1–8). Jesus' prediction of his being lifted up from the earth (12:32) associates his cross with a throne: "He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die" (12:33). Ascriptions of him as king, seriously or ironically, abound in various conversations with Pilate before and during Jesus' crucifixion (18:33, 37, 39; 19:12, 14, 19–22). Jesus addresses his accusers with majestic bearing: "You say that I am a king" (18:37); "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above" (19:11). He is crowned with thorns, dressed in purple (19:2),⁹ and carries his own crossbeam to Golgotha (19:17). Supported by an entourage beneath him (19:25b–27), Jesus knows that his life is finished and affirms his end with equanimity (19:28–30). His body is given a royal burial: "a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds" (19:39). Jesus is no common revolutionary; otherwise, "my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews" (18:36). His kingdom is not from this world (18:36), yet Jesus is sovereign over the only realm that ultimately matters.

In his account of the crucifixion, Mark employs some of the same irony: "Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe" (15:32; see also vv. 9, 12, 18, 26). In Mark, however, the language of kingship at Golgotha does not characterize Jesus' conduct but sharpens the incongruity between himself and Barabbas, a genuine insurrectionist who is released only because Jesus is hanged (15:6–15). Bartimaeus beseeches Jesus as David's son (10:47–48), but his vision is none too clear (cf. 12:35–37). Finally, Mark does not portray Jesus as a figure of sovereign majesty: of all the Gospels, Mark's description of the triumphal entry is least concentrated on Jesus himself (11:9–10; cf. John 12:13; Matt 21:9; Luke 19:38). Jesus exercises unconventional authority over unclean spirits (1:21–27; 3:15; 6:7) and religious practice (2:1–12; 7:1–23; 11:27–33). Unusual power attends his healings (5:30; cf. 6:5). Most impressive, however, is the degree to which Jesus renounces his power while reinforcing the necessity of his suffering in the stark, carefully situated predictions of his death and resurrection in 8:31, 9:31, and 10:33–34—none of which is paralleled in John. There is nothing remotely Johannine about Mark's tormented Jesus, prostrate and disregarded by companions in Gethsemane

9 Some commentators might add John 19:13, inferring that Pilate sat (*ekathisen*, transitively) Jesus on the judgment seat instead of (intransitively) seating himself on it (see George L. Parsenios, *Rhetoric and Drama in the Johannine Lawsuit Motif*, WUNT 258 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010], 38–39). Grammatically either is possible; a case can be made for both. The intransitive use seems to me burdened with fewer difficulties (Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (xiii–xxi)*, AB 29A [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970], 880–81). I worry that the alternative fits my argument too conveniently.

(14:32–42). Indeed, the Johannine Jesus overrides his Markan counterpart: “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name” (John 12:27–28a). That magisterial Jesus receives instantaneous confirmation: “Then a voice came from heaven, ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again’” (12:28b). When Mark’s crucified Jesus, abandoned by friend and foe alike (14:66–72; 15:29–32), cries, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (15:34)—a question unimaginable on the lips of the Johannine Jesus, whose Father always hears him (John 11:41–42; 17:1–5)—there is no answer but silence. Once again: in one Gospel the darkest areas are lightest; in the other, the lightest areas are darkest.

An addendum to this section is prompted by one of Mark’s most mysterious passages, which lacks equivalent in John: the transfiguration of Jesus (9:2–8). Jesus is momentarily glimpsed in heavenly radiance: perhaps a window onto “the kingdom of God ... come in power,” promised in 9:1, surely a warrant to “listen to him!” (9:7). His immediate instruction, delivered bluntly and strictly, is dedicated to self-renunciation unto death, endorsed by God through resurrection (8:30–38; 9:9–13). Jesus transfigured is a prolepsis of the glory promised those who endure persecution like his own (8:38; 13:26), bypassing painless privilege (10:35–45). In John, the legend of the transfiguration would be redundant: its Jesus, from start to finish, *is* “the true light” of “the world” (John 1:9; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46) that exposes evil and gives life (3:19–20; 8:12). The glory of the Johannine Jesus never evanesces: it is beheld by believers (1:14; 11:40; 17:24), revealed by his signs (2:11; 11:4), culminated in the hour of his death (12:23; 17:4), and ratified by the Father (12:28; 13:32; 16:14; 17:1, 5). C. K. Barrett grasps the nettle: “The paradox of the Son of man [in John 3:13] is that even when on earth he is in heaven; the mythical—or historical—descent and ascent is of such a kind that effectively the Son of man is in both places at once: the top and the bottom of the ladder.”¹⁰

Titles

Limitations of space preclude extended examination of the titles attributed to Jesus in the Second and Fourth Gospels, but for our purposes such is unnecessary. In both, “Son [of God]” and “Son of Man” predominate as designations of Jesus. In John, Jesus usually refers to himself as “the Son” (3:16–17, 35–36; 5:19–23, 26; 6:40; 8:36; 14:13; 17:1 [“your Son”]), which corresponds with his characteristic reference to God as “the Father [who] loves the Son and has placed

10 “Paradox and Dualism,” in C. K. Barrett, *Essays on John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 98–115, quotation from 110–11.

all things in his hands" (3:35).¹¹ Like "Son of God" (seven times in John, three of which are Jesus' self-references [5:25; 10:36; 11:4]), this metaphor's primary connotation is Jesus' distinctively filial relationship to God: "The Father and I are one" (10:30). That, of course, is the gravamen of his antagonists' complaint that Jesus was "making himself equal to God" (5:18). Jesus also refers to himself as "Son of Man" (1:51; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28; 9:35; 12:23; 13:31); as in the Synoptics, this designation issues only from Jesus' lips.¹² Its precise nuance is disputed; I am inclined to agree with those¹³ who argue that, in John, "Son of Man" essentially restates the incarnational claim in 1:14: "the Word became flesh."

Mark moves in a different direction. Only twice in the Second Gospel does Jesus speak of himself as "the Son" (12:6; 13:32). Others address him as "Son of God": demons, who recognize in him a superior enemy (1:24; 3:11; 5:7); the high priest, who asks, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" and receives a positive answer (14:61–62); the centurion at the cross (15:39); and, of supreme significance, the heavenly voice (*bat-qōl*) at Jesus' baptism (1:11) and transfiguration (9:7). In the latter passages, conflating several Old Testament texts (Gen 22:2; Ps 2:7; Isa 42:1; 53),¹⁴ Mark's theology intersects with John's: God reveals a uniquely intimate, familial relationship with Jesus. Yet Mark's principal appellation for Jesus is "Son of Man," which occurs thirteen times,

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- 11 By my count, Jesus denotes God as "the Father," "my Father," or "your Father" 105 times in John.
 - 12 The exceptions: "The crowd answered him, ... 'How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?'" (John 12:34); "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter" (Mark 3:28, RSV).
 - 13 Francis J. Moloney, *The Johannine Son of Man*, BSR 14, 2nd ed. (Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1978), esp. 213; Douglas R. A. Hare, *The Son of Man Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 111; Craig R. Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel* (Grand Raids: Eerdmans, 2008), 97; Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 55–58. "It is as Son of man that Jesus forms the connecting link between the earthly and heavenly spheres; his earthly existence is the place where heavenly things become visible, and also the place where heavenly things are rejected by mankind" (C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978], 212).
 - 14 Mark and John's uses of scripture are mare's nests beyond solution here. In general, both evangelists assume reciprocity between the comprehensibility of the Christian witness and scripture's intelligibility. Mark's Jesus upholds the law with an authority superior to Moses' (7:10; 10:2–9; 12:18–27); his teaching and death amplify the prophets and psalms (7:6–7; 14:62; 15:24, 34). John more boldly insists that the scriptures testify to Jesus, apart from whom their fulfillment is impossible and their intent is bound to be misunderstood (5:39). For this reason, citations of "your law" defend Jesus against charges brought against him (8:17; 10:34; cf. 7:22–23, 51).

always by Jesus as an oblique form of self-reference.¹⁵ The phrase conveys different, mutually interpretive senses in Mark: Jesus as possessing extraordinary authority on earth (2:10, 28), an apocalyptic figure who will return at history's climax (8:38; 13:26; 14:62), and one who will be vindicated for having suffered ignominy and death for others (8:31; 9:9, 12, 31b; 10:33–34, 45; 14:21, 41). Mark accents the last of these three undertones: references to the suffering and vindicated Son of Man outnumber the others by a ratio of three or four to one.

To sum up these findings: in both John and Mark, "Son of God" and "Son of Man" are important, complementary modes of expressing aspects of Jesus' significance, but their comparative weights vary in roughly inverse proportion. In the Fourth Gospel "Son of Man" is secondary, serving "the Son [of God]" as a way of saying that enfleshed in this man, Jesus, is the Word that saves the world (John 3:16; 4:42). In the Second Gospel "the Son [of God]" is secondary, serving "Son of Man" as a way of saying that God has accredited and will vindicate this one, who "give[s] his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45; cf. 1:11; 9:7).¹⁶ Put differently, John's readers are invited to take their interpretive cue from its prologue; Mark's readers, from the passion. These opposite narrative orientations—one at the beginning, the other at the end—obversely attract and correlate their Gospels' dominant titles for Jesus.

15 Whether, in Mark 8:38, 13:26–27, and 14:62, Jesus indicates a figure other than himself is a matter of dispute. Read in their respective contexts, these verses suggest that Mark believes that Jesus, and no one else, is the Son of Man (C. Clifton Black, *Mark*, ANTC [Nashville: Abingdon, 2011], 201). Referring to John 3:13, Culpepper identifies another Christological inversion germane to our analysis: whereas Mark refers to the Son of Man's return in glory, "In John, [the Son of Man] has come from above (descent) and will return to his Father (ascent)" ("The Christology of the Johannine Writings," in *Who Do You Say That I Am? Essays on Christology*, ed. Mark Allan Powell and David R. Bauer [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999], 66–87, quotation from 76).

16 In Mark, Jesus publicly confirms his identity as "Son of God" only once: in frank acceptance of the high priest's incredulous acclamation of him as such (14:61–62). This, by no mere coincidence, pulls the trigger for the Son of Man's deliverance to death by the hands of sinners (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34). By contrast, various interlocutors throughout John address Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29, cf. 36), the "Messiah" (4:25–26), "the Holy One of God" (6:68–70a), "the Son of Man" (9:35–38), "the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world" (11:27), and even "My Lord and my God!" (20:28). Jesus refuses none of these designations because the Father has granted such belief to those who apply them (6:29, 40, 65).

Discourse

Relevant to this inquiry is Jesus' speech, which may be considered on two fronts. The *style* of the Johannine Jesus is elevated, redundant, even pretentious.¹⁷ He is remarkably loquacious and "congenitally incapable of giving a straight answer."¹⁸ After healing a paralytic at a pool by Jerusalem's Sheep Gate, Jesus answers his critics in 520 uninterrupted Greek words (5:19–47). On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, he delivers another address of 704 words (8:12–58, with brief interventions by others). Interrupted seven times by his disciples, Jesus' parting words to them (13:31–16:33), which elide into a closing prayer (17:1b–26), weigh in at around 2,140 words. At 14:31b he inserts what has been dubbed "a delayed dramatic exit"¹⁹ characteristic of classical tragedies—"Get up, let us go from here" (author's translation)—then keeps right on talking. In 16:12 he says, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." Although John probably intends poignancy, many commentators have heaved a sigh of relief—while Jesus continues to elaborate. By contrast, the speech of Mark's Jesus tends to be abruptly clipped: "Follow me" (2:14). "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" (4:9, 23). "Do you not yet understand?" (8:21: posed of his disciples after a Q & A of *non-sequiturs* that explains nothing [8:17–20]). "Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another" (9:50). Normally the Markan Jesus keeps his comments crisp²⁰ and shuts others up (1:44, 34; 3:12; 7:36; 8:26, 30; 9:9; 11:33; 12:17; 15:2). John and Mark offer their readers a choice in how they shall be confused: by a Jesus too prolix, or one who is too laconic.

Whether sympathetic or adversarial, Jesus' audiences in both Gospels misunderstand his words (Mark 7:18; 8:21; 9:32; John 3:10; 10:6; 12:16). The causes of their incomprehension, however, are mirror images that involve his teaching's *substance*. Mark's Jesus characteristically speaks in parables: "dark sayings" (*meshālīm*; cf. Ps 78:2), vivid metaphors that cryptically liken the irruption of God's sovereignty, "the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:15), to aspects of everyday

17 On John's use of rhetorical grandeur, deemed suitable for sublime subjects, see "The Words That You Gave to Me I Have Given to Them," in C. Clifton Black, *The Rhetoric of the Gospel: Theological Artistry in the Gospels and Acts*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 83–99.

18 R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 112.

19 George L. Parsenios, *Departure and Consolation: The Johannine Farewell Discourses in Light of Greco-Roman Literature*, SupNovT 117 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 55–70.

20 The longest, usually interrupted, discourses of Jesus in Mark are 4:3–32 (the parable chapter), 7:6–23 (on defilement), and 13:5–37 (the eschatological address on the Mount of Olives).

life (4:1–34). Repeatedly Jesus points to that kingdom (9:1, 47; 10:14–15, 23–25; 14:25); rarely does he talk of himself and, when doing so, the references are elliptical (2:10, 28; 8:31; 12:6; 13:32). In John, the circumstances are reversed virtually point-for-point. Only twice does Jesus mention the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5); only the aphorisms of a grain of earth (12:24) and a woman in labor (16:21) approximate Mark's parables in form. Instead, the Johannine Jesus proclaims, "My kingdom is not from this world" (18:36, emphasis added) and persistently speaks of himself from a post-Easter perspective as the defining fulfillment of human need: "I am the bread of life" (6:35, 48; cf. 6:41, 51); "I am the true vine" (15:1, cf. 5); "I am the light of the world" (8:12; 9:5); "I am the gate for the sheep" (10:7); "I am the good shepherd" (10:11, 14); "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6); "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25). These *egō-emi* sayings may allude to the name of Israel's God (Exod 3:14; Isa 43:11), a likelihood that emerges in John 8:58 and 18:5 to the enragement (8:59) or flooring (18:6) of Jesus' opponents. The grounds for his execution, blasphemy, are implausibly pronounced in Mark 14:64;²¹ the stronger case is made in John 10:33: "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God." The unbelieving world (*ho kosmos*) cannot understand the Johannine Jesus because he is from above and not of this world (8:23).

Again, the Fourth Gospel's presentation is the Second's turned backside forward. Mark offers a Jesus very much of this world who riddles *to engender* obscurity (4:11–12). The assertions of the Johannine Jesus are so blatant—"the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (10:38)—that their acceptance is impossible apart from belief. In Mark the truth about Jesus is temporarily withheld (1:34; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:30; 9:9, 30): "For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light" (4:22). In John (3:19), "this is the judgment, that the light *has come* into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil." The true light already enlightens the world (1:9); those unable to behold his glory, as could Isaiah (1:14; 12:41), hate the light (3:20) and are blinded by it (12:40). Jesus "came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind" (9:39).

Deeds

Intimately connected with these Evangelists' converse outlooks are their estimations of Jesus' marvelous works. The miracle at Cana (John 2:1–11) and the

21 In Mark 14:62 Jesus employs a circumlocution, "the right hand of the Power," to avoid pronouncing the divine name. Having ears to hear, the high priest has not heard (4:12; 8:18).

healing of the official's son (4:46–54) as well as others who are sick (6:2) are “signs” (*sēmeia*) that reveal Jesus’ glory and are capable of kindling faith (2:11, 23; 4:48; 10:40–42; 12:37). Though somewhat in the dark (coming to Jesus by night), Nicodemus glimpses the truth: “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God” (3:2). Those seeking Jesus in Capernaum ask for a sign, that they may see it and believe him; he offers them true bread from heaven, for which they plead (6:32–34). After receiving sight from Jesus, a man who had been blind from birth declares his faith and worships the Son of Man (9:1, 6, 38). Another sign, the raising of Lazarus, stimulates a crowd to welcome Jesus to Jerusalem (12:17–18). Although “the Jews,” who by definition do not believe (7:1; 8:48, 52; 9:22; 10:31; 11:8; 19:12), react to Jesus’ signs with incomprehension (2:18–21) or fear (11:47–48), many of them do believe on the basis of what they have seen (8:31; 11:45; 12:11): “When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than this man has done?” (7:31; cf. 9:16). For John that question is rhetorical. “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (20:30–31).

Mark would likely concur with that testimony, with one reservation: the probative value of signs. The Second Evangelist evinces no reluctance in detailing Jesus’ exorcisms and healings (1:21–34; 1:40–45; 3:7–15; 5:1–43, 6:53–56, among others). By linking faith with restoration (4:35–41; 5:34, 56; 9:14–29) and vicious misapprehension of Jesus’ power with unbelief (2:6–7; 3:1–6, 22; 6:1–6a), Mark rhymes with John. Yet Mark is noticeably skittish about construing “power” (5:30; 6:14) or “mighty works” (6:2, 5; 9:39) with *sēmeia*.²² Disputatious Pharisees who ask “for a sign from heaven, to test him,” are rebuffed as spokesmen of “this [faithless] generation” (8:11–13; cf. 8:38; 9:19). Likewise, “False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect” (13:22).²³ Such a position is no making patent of what is latent in John. This is retroversion of Johannine theology.

22 Mark 13:4 may constitute an exception: the advent of “the Son of Man with great power [*dynameōs pollēs*] and glory.” True, Mark does not identify this occurrence as a “sign”; nevertheless, it offers a reliable, albeit delayed, response to distressed disciples who, in 13:4, have asked Jesus to point them toward a *sēmeion* of the final judgment. For a detailed argument along this line, see C. Clifton Black, “An Oration at Olivet,” in *The Rhetoric of the Gospel*, 49–52.

23 Among the considerable intrinsic evidence against the authenticity of Mark 16:9–20 is its easy association of “signs” with faith and evangelism (vv. 17, 20).

Disciples and Discipleship

The disciples in John exhibit a capacity to change their minds and grow in understanding.²⁴ As early as John 1:46, Nathanael, “an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile” (1:47, RSV), wonders if anything good can come out of Nazareth. Moments later he has hyperbolically reversed his opinion of Jesus (1:49). Similarly, Martha of Bethany begins by lamenting Jesus’ delay in rescuing her brother but, with Jesus’ help, promptly entrusts herself to him (11:20–27). Though initially befuddled by the rabbi’s teaching (3:1–10), Nicodemus makes surprise reappearances to defend Jesus and to anoint his remains (7:50–51; 19:39). Like the disciples generally (4:27, 31–34), at first the Samaritan woman is not tuned into Jesus’ frequency to understand him (4:1–15), but her awareness develops into credible evidence to her fellow citizens (4:28–30, 39–42); likewise, Mary Magdalene, the earliest witness and first evangelist of her risen Rabbouni (20:11–18). Even though Jesus’ teaching perplexes members of the Twelve (6:60; 11:16; 14:5, 8, 22), eventually they tumble to the truth: “Now we know that you know all things, and do not need to have anyone question you; by this we believe that you came from God” (16:30). Early on Simon Peter professes that his Lord has “the words of eternal life” (6:68), receives his master’s washing (13:6–9), denies him (18:15–27) as foretold (14:36–38), is ultimately absolved (21:7, 15–19), and with his fellows is authorized to perpetuate the risen Jesus’ mission (20:19–23). Shorn of doubt (20:24–27), Thomas utters the climactic declaration: “My Lord and my God!” (20:28). Only two disciples remain unwavering: Judas Iscariot, the betrayer destined to be lost (6:71; 12:4; 13:2, 26–30; 17:12; 18:2–5), and the Beloved Disciple (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:17, 20–23), the first to understand the import of the empty tomb (20:8; cf. 21:7) and the Johannine community’s paradigmatic witness (21:24).

The disciples in John enjoy special benefits. Because the Father has irrevocably entrusted them to the Son in whom they believe (6:38–45; 10:27–29; 17:6–12, 20–24), they do “not come under judgment, but [have] passed from death to life” (5:24). They abide in Jesus, as branches are nourished by the vine (15:1–8), and are sustained by the Paraclete, Jesus’ postmortem proxy and continuing presence (14:16–17, 25–27; 15:26–27; 16:17–25). They enjoy post-Easter hindsight (2:22; 12:16; 13:7). The Twelve in Mark enjoy almost none of these advantages,²⁵ and their fortunes worsen as that Gospel plays out. They accept Jesus’ initial

24 See Susan E. Hylen, *Imperfect Believers: Ambiguous Characters in the Gospel of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009).

25 The Holy Spirit’s support of beleaguered believers in Mark 13:11 is analogous to John 16:8–13.

call (1:16–20; 2:14; 3:13–18a), giving up everything to follow him (10:28–31), fulfill their first missionary assignment (6:7–13), obey the teacher’s ludicrous demands (6:30–44; 8:1–10; 11:1–8), catch glimmers of his identity (8:29; 9:2–8), and prepare his final Passover (14:12–16). Meanwhile they are never able to shake off their fear (4:35–41; 6:46–52; 9:32; 10:32; 16:8). Not once in Mark does a member of the Twelve “believe” or demonstrate the faith detailed or suggested by such needy nobodies as a paralytic’s entourage (2:5), the chronic menstruant (5:34), the Syro-Phoenician woman (7:24–30), the father of an epileptic child (9:14–29), blind Bartimaeus (10:46–52), Jerusalem’s poor widow (12:41–44), or the anointer memorialized in Bethany (14:3–9). Repeatedly the Twelve ignore or reject Jesus’ plain training in cross-bearing discipleship, bickering among themselves for exalted status (8:32–33; 9:33–34; 10:35–41). None of them appropriates power available only through prayer (9:28–29). One colludes with Jerusalem’s chief priests to betray Jesus (14:10–11, 43–46). Three sleep during his anguish in Gethsemane (14:32–42; cf. 13:33–37). Another triply denies knowing him (14:66–72). All forsake him, fleeing at his arrest (14:50–52). Despite their receipt of “the secret [*to mystērion*] of the kingdom of God,” they are as blinded and deafened by it as others (4:10–13; cf. 6:52; 8:17–21). Among all of Jesus’ opponents in this Gospel, only Peter is addressed as Satan (8:33; cf. John 8:44; 13:27). His last words about Jesus are devastating: “I do not know this man you are talking about” (Mark 14:71). Redemption by the risen Jesus awaits him and his confrères in Galilee (16:7), but, since the remaining female followers flee the empty tomb in fear, speechless of the Easter message, one never reads of the message’s delivery (16:1–8).

The disciples in John become stronger; their Markan counterparts dwindle away. Of course this topsy-turvy has another involution: the Second Gospel suggests a denser approach to faith and a more developed account of moral agency than does the Fourth. In Mark faith oscillates, swinging from confidence to panic, caught by weak mortals before slipping from their grasp (5:33–36; 9:23–24). Because faith is more a matter of volition than of cognition, its antipode is cowardice (4:40) or fear (5:15, 33, 36), which repudiates Jesus’ authority to wield God’s potency (6:3c–4; 11:27–33). At Gethsemane (14:32–42) and Golgotha (15:21–33) Jesus himself reveals the depth of trust that activates self-sacrificial service to God for the gospel’s sake. At Easter, God’s own fidelity is validated (16:6). John’s articulation of faith²⁶ risks reduction to “believing in Jesus” or believing in God as revealed by Jesus (e.g., 6:29, 40; 12:44; 14:1; 17:21). That decision entails genuine peril (9:22; 12:42; 16:2), but, apart from 9:1–41, one

26 The noun *pistis* never occurs in John; the verb *pisteuein*, 99 times.

rarely witnesses its cost.²⁷ As for disciples' moral responsibility, Mark warns that "the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing" (4:18–19). A devout man's possessions block his inheritance of eternal life (10:17–22); the kingdom of God belongs to the child with nothing (10:13–17). Avarice ruptures the social fabric, perverting filial responsibility (7:6–13; cf. Exod 20:12/Deut 5:16), easing divorce, whose economic burden fell primarily on the wife (Mark 10:2–9), and encouraging fraud (10:19b; cf. Deut 24:14). To all of these points John says nothing. In Mark accountability resolves itself in unfettered love of God and neighbor (12:28–34; cf. Deut 6:4; Lev 19:18). In John love is centripetal: "love one another" (13:34–35; 15:12, 17).

Light Sensitivity

If there be value in this essay's experiment, I shall leave to others its *traditions-geschichtliche* or literary-critical implications. Consonant with the attitudes of the biblical authors, I am more interested in this study's theological upshot. Many years ago, Raymond Brown (1928–1998) concluded, "With Käsemann, we agree that the church did not make a mistake in taking the Fourth Gospel into the canon, but it would have been a mistake if it had not placed the Gospel According to Mark alongside the Gospel According to John."²⁸ With all due respect to that *magister in sacra pagina*, I think the language of error puts our assessment of these writings on a wrong footing. For Christian faith, the Second and Fourth Gospels are more than canonical complements. In my view these Gospels are, in general aspect and many matters of detail, nearly diametrical opposites whose attraction, each to the other, binds the tensive, insoluble elements of the Christian confession: "The place of weakness, when it is also the place of obedience to God, is the place where the power of God is made

27 Yet Leander E. Keck is correct that, at least by implication, Johannine dualism evokes "a decision: either to deny the validity of Jesus' construal of one's condition (and thereby to remain determinedly in it) or to affirm that Jesus is right and so have the grounding of one's existence reconstituted, a change so radical that the appropriate metaphor for it is being 'begotten by God'" ([John 1:12b–13]; "Derivation as Destiny: 'Of-ness' in Johannine Christology, Anthropology, and Soteriology," in *Exploring the Gospel of John*, 274–88, quotation from 284).

28 Raymond E. Brown, "The Kerygma of the Gospel According to John: The Johannine View of Jesus in Modern Studies," *Int* 21 (1967): 387–400 (quotation, 400; referring to Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17* [London: SCM, 1968], 74–78).

known and exercised.”²⁹ This keynote, as old as Philippians 2:5–11, must be reclaimed by the church in every generation, tempted to abstract one of the Christ-hymn’s stanzas to the other’s excision. Detached from his resurrection, Jesus’ crucifixion is tragic farce. Divorced from his crucifixion, Jesus’ resurrection is grotesque Fantasyland. Let John be John. Let Mark be Mark. Reading the one while simultaneously sensitive to the other’s rejoinder develops a portrait of the gospel neither bleached nor blackened but properly exposed.

29 Edwyn Clement Hoskyns and Francis Noel Davey, *Crucifixion–Resurrection: The Pattern of the Theology and Ethics of the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1981), 130.

Placing Bethsaida: From Mark to Matthew and Luke to John

Elizabeth Struthers Malbon

Bethsaida is referenced in each of the canonical Gospels (Mark 6:45; 8:22; Matt 11:21; Luke 9:10; 10:13; John 1:44; 12:21—and nowhere else in the Bible) with the same denotation: a village or city on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee (or Lake of Gennesaret, according to Luke 5:1), at the northeastern corner of the sea, to the east of where the Jordan River runs into the sea. However, Bethsaida does not bear the same connotation—basically having to do with the ethnicity of its inhabitants—throughout the Gospels. Although historical documents and archaeological conclusions help interpreters understand the ancient contexts in which the Gospels—and their authors and their audiences—were embedded, only literary criticism, especially narrative criticism, can help interpreters appreciate the connotative differences of “Bethsaida” in each of the Gospels. Alan Culpepper’s *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* was perhaps the first monograph to make a claim for the indispensable importance of such literary criticism, or narrative criticism, of the Gospels.¹ It is a claim I have been pursuing ever since, and I am happy to do so here in relation to Bethsaida and in honor of Alan’s many contributions to New Testament scholarship.

Bethsaida in the First-Century World: Geography and Ethnography

Contemporary understandings of geography in the developed Western world, based on easy access to rich scientific data and accurate maps, are misleading if applied to the ancient world reflected in the canonical Gospels. Eric C. Stewart’s book, *Gathered around Jesus: An Alternative Spatial Practice in the Gospel of Mark*, is an “attempt to understand the social nature of space in antiquity.”² Chapter 3 is especially relevant in this regard because it reviews

1 R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983, 1987).

2 Eric C. Stewart, *Gathered around Jesus: An Alternative Spatial Practice in the Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Clarke, 2009), 29. See my review of Stewart’s book in *RBL* 03/2011, from which the following material in this paragraph is taken.

both ancient authors (Homer, Herodotus, Ptolemy, Pliny, Strabo, Josephus, Philo, among many others) and contemporary scholarship on space in ancient texts. The chapter is organized as a useful compendium of key ideas. For the ancient world, space meant the *oikoumenē*, the inhabited (or civilized) world, with some interest in the “scientific” geography of measurement but even more interest in “human geography” (ethnography of foreign lands). Space was personalized; geographic and ethnographic stereotypes were the norm; and the idea of environmental determinism was readily accepted, with each group (Greeks, Romans, Jews) regarding its own space as the center of the world. Cosmologically, the *oikoumenē* was understood as surrounded by the Ocean, with heaven above and the underworld below—although limited travel between these regions was possible. The ancients’ way of describing space generally hid power relations and offered “the opportunity to portray one’s own culture as normative in spatial terms.”³ Thus geography and ethnography are intertwined in the ancient world.

A former undergraduate student of mine, Nancy Mason, pursued her curiosity about the different assumptions the Gospel writers make about Bethsaida into an impressive historical research project, resulting in a paper presented at several conferences.⁴ Like Stewart, she realizes that geography in the ancient world is a way of presenting cultural ethnography. I present her abstract here to suggest her conclusions:

This paper will examine the usage of a town called Bethsaida within the contexts of the Gospels, other first- and second-century literature, and archaeology. The four Gospels are unique historical and literary sources, generally recording similar events and serving, in many cases, as sources for one another. They are interconnected in such a way that, if the same subject is discussed and narrated differently by each of the authors, motivations likely exist behind why an author changed, or omitted, what his forerunners wrote. Many idiosyncrasies exist within the four Gospels in respect to their references to the town of Bethsaida. Mark considers Capernaum to be the hometown of Andrew and Peter, while John lists their home as Bethsaida. In Mark, Jesus asks the disciples to head to Bethsaida after the feeding of the 5,000, while in Luke they are already in

3 Stewart, *Gathered around Jesus*, 127.

4 Nancy Mason, “Bethsaida in the Gospels: A Dynamic Portrait,” National Conference on Undergraduate Research, Eastern Washington University, Cheney, Washington, April 16–18, 2015; ASOR/SECSOR, Nashville, March 8, 2015; Mediterranean Studies Association 18th Annual International Congress, Athens, Greece, May 28, 2015.

Bethsaida when the 5,000 are fed. It appears that Mark, the original Gospel writer, portrayed Bethsaida as Gentile, whereas Matthew, Luke, and John painted a Jewish picture of Bethsaida. A similar shift seems to occur in non-biblical literary sources that mention Bethsaida during the first and second centuries (Josephus, Pliny, Ptolemy): from a Gentile to a Jewish place and from a non-Galilean town to a Galilean one. Additionally, the archaeological record at Et-Tell, which has been identified as Bethsaida, appears to show an influx in its Jewish presence beginning around the first-century BCE. This differing evidence, with shifts in literature showing up around the first-century CE and shifts in archaeology showing up around the first-century BCE, could make sense if we consider that a shift in reputation takes significant time, even in the modern world. Thus there appears to have been a shift in both Bethsaida's relationship to Galilee and its ethnographic and metaphorically geographic reputation that can be seen in the Gospels, other first- and second-century writings, and the archaeological record.⁵

In reaching her conclusions, Mason discusses Mark as "A Gospel with a Gentile Bethsaida," relying on my work and that of Werner Kelber⁶ (one could add here the work of Kelly Iverson⁷) and Matthew, Luke, and John as "Gospels with a Jewish Bethsaida," relying on our discussions in and out of class. Working with a high degree of initiative, Mason then reviews both "First-Century Sources with a Gentile Bethsaida," including Josephus and Pliny, and a "First-Century Source with a Jewish Bethsaida," Ptolemy. Mason also offers a brief summary of the excavations at Et-Tell, identified as Bethsaida, and their interpretation. I have found her work on these historical sources and excavation reports regarding Bethsaida of great interest; however, both are beyond the scope of my argument here.⁸ My questions are literary ones about how each of the canonical Gospel writers characterizes Bethsaida within his overall narrative. However, the historical shift to which Mason draws attention, with

5 <http://www.ncurproceedings.org/ojs/index.php/NCUR2015/article/viewFile/1479/814>
Mason's entire paper (in its first 2015 version) is available at this url.

6 Especially Werner H. Kelber, *The Kingdom in Mark: A New Place and a New Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974).

7 Kelly R. Iverson, *Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark: "Even the Dogs Under the Table Eat the Children's Crumbs,"* LNTS 339 (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2007).

8 For a helpful review of the broader literature and archaeology regarding Galilee, see R. Alan Culpepper, "The Galilee Quest: The Historical Jesus and the Historical Galilee," *PRSt*, forthcoming.

the archeological record suggesting an earlier shift than the historical texts do, may well help make understandable the literary shift that occurs from Mark, to Matthew and Luke, then to John.⁹

Bethsaida in Mark: Geography and Expansive Discipleship

Bethsaida is referenced twice in Mark, at 6:45 and 8:22. The first occurrence is after the feeding of the 5,000 (6:32–44), which is placed in a “Jewish” setting.¹⁰ No specific place name is linked with the event, but the last place referenced in the narrative is Jesus’ *patris*, his “hometown” at 6:1,¹¹ followed by the intercalated sending out of the disciples/flashback to the beheading of John by Herod/return of the disciples. However, a second clue to the “Jewishness” of the feeding of the 5,000 is the number of basketsful of leftover pieces collected: twelve, reminiscent of the twelve tribes of Israel echoed in the twelve “Jewish” disciples of the “Jewish” Jesus. After this feeding of “Jewish” crowds, described by reference to “Jewish” Scripture as “like sheep without a shepherd” (6:34, NRSV here and throughout), the Markan Jesus sends the disciples on ahead of him, across the Sea of Galilee, “to Bethsaida.” Jesus, with the disciples, has previously crossed the sea from west to east to the country of the Gerasenes (5:1), where Jesus cast a Legion of demons out of a possessed man. In Mark’s Gospel, the western side of the sea is clearly indicated as “Jewish,” the eastern side as Gentile. And Mark consistently gives a second clue to this geographical/ethnographical significance, in addition to a place name. In the country of the Gerasenes, the second clue is the presence of a herd of two thousand pigs, a valuable economic resource on the Gentile side but not on the “Jewish” side; thus, their destruction in the sea is an “in” “Jewish” joke at the same time as the name “Legion” is a joke on the pig-eating, Roman overlords.

The sequence of narrative events is important because Jesus’ sending the disciples across the Sea of Galilee to the Gentiles at 6:45, although verbally marked as going “ahead” of (*proagein*) Jesus, is narratively marked as following

9 As a literary—and specifically narrative—critic, I use the names Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John to refer to the Gospel narratives—texts and not people, although streams of traditions, authors, and audiences are always implied.

10 The quotation marks around “Jewish” are a reminder that the term is not only somewhat problematic but also anachronistic for Mark’s Gospel and for all the canonical Gospels.

11 “While filmic depiction is continually refreshed ..., verbal description simply ‘continues to apply’ [quoting Ruth Ronen] until an explicit update is required by a change in conditions” (Sabine Buchholz and Manfred Jahn, “Space in Narrative,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan [London: Routledge, 2005], 551–55, quotation from 553).

his lead after 5:1–20. Still, the disciples are unable to go “to Bethsaida” as sent. The disciples, “straining at the oars against an adverse wind” (6:48), are unable to cross the sea in the boat; Jesus comes to them on the sea without the aid of a boat. Then they all land, not on the eastern shore at Bethsaida as directed, but back on the western shore from which they set out, at Gennesaret (6:53). Thus, 6:45 marks what I labeled in my dissertation and first book as the Markan “detour.”¹² The label “detour” works well because the disciples, accompanied by Jesus, do eventually reach Bethsaida (at 8:22). What is highlighted in Mark’s story is what happens during the detour. The Markan Jesus realizes it will be necessary to, as it were, take the disciples by the hand and reiterate in action and teaching his conviction that the in-breaking reign of God is good news for both “Jews,” the traditional people of God, and Gentiles, the traditional outsiders. But to say that “the Markan Jesus realizes” is to say that we, the audience, realize that the implied author is assuming that *we* need to be taken by the hand and have reiterated to us in action and teaching that the in-breaking reign of God is good news for both our group and our group’s “outsiders.”

So, what happens on the Markan detour? First, Jesus heals the sick in the “whole region” (6:55) around “Jewish” Gennesaret. Second, Jesus argues with some Pharisees and elders, teachers of the “Jewish” Law, about the tradition of the elders in relation to the Scripture, a most “Jewish” debate. The Markan Jesus, of course, wins the debate; this is his story. The direction of the debate about defilement is to show that the tradition of the elders imposes limits that are not imposed by Scripture and downplays certain elements of Scripture. Through what is called a “parable” (7:17), the issue of defilement is shifted *from* the hand washing with which the argument began *to* “evil intentions” and their resultant actions, “fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander pride, folly” (7:21–22). Such evil intentions and evil actions are equally possible for “Jews” and Gentiles to commit, and equally possible for “Jews” and Gentiles to avoid—unlike the regulations for hand washing and food preparation that separate “Jews” and Gentiles. In some way, this unity in place of separation is behind the parenthetical comment: “(Thus he declared all foods clean)” (7:19).¹³

12 Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark* (New York and San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986; Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 22, 27–29, 54–55. See also Malbon, “The Jesus of Mark and the Sea of Galilee,” *JBL* 103 (1984): 363–77, especially 372–73; and Malbon, “Echoes and Foreshadowings in Mark 4–8: Reading and Reading,” *JBL* 112 (1993): 211–30, especially 226–27.

13 This expression deserves greater care than it is usually given—or given here, and it is given that care in the doctoral dissertation of Eike Mueller, “Cleaning the Common: A Narrative-Intertextual Study of Mark 7:1–23,” Andrews University, 2014.

Third, during the detour, Jesus leads his disciples to the Gentile region of Tyre (7:24), where he heals the daughter of the Syrophenician woman. The NRSV translation of *Hellēnis* (Greek: Hellenic) as “Gentile” at 7:26 is understandable. As Mark’s narrative intensifies the “Jewish” context of 7:1–23, so it intensifies the Gentile context of 7:24–30. Many readers, both scholarly and not, have become dismayed over Jesus’ harsh initial reply to the woman, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs” (7:27). But if we remember that the story is told for the sake of the audience, we realize that this encounter not only allows the implied author to reiterate the both/and teaching that is central to the “detour” section but also to have the male “Jewish” Jesus exemplify not only helping a Gentile woman but learning from a Gentile woman—both giving to an “other” and receiving from an “other.” Perhaps such an amazing teaching opportunity is worth the break in logic (Jesus has already given more than crumbs in exorcising the Gentile Gerasene demoniac). If one imagines an oral storyteller proclaiming these stories, the power of personal address in 7:24–30 could easily be conceived to overpower the “discrepancy” of Jesus healing a Gentile previously in the story. The detour is about teaching again what was not picked up the first time by the disciples within the story—or, probably, by the audience just outside the story.

Fourth, during the detour, Jesus cures a deaf man with a speech impediment in the Gentile territory of the Decapolis, the “Ten [Greek] Cities.” This passage also offers a place where many readers, mostly scholarly ones, trip up: the challenging geographical markers at 7:31, “Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon [which is north of Tyre] towards the Sea of Galilee [which is south and east of Tyre], in the region of the Decapolis [which is on the east side of the Sea of Galilee].” In my world, I think nothing of driving from Blacksburg an hour north to Roanoke, to catch a plane to fly several states south to Atlanta, to catch a plane to fly more states north to Boston. I know this would look odd on a map, but it has to do with an airline’s hub city. I have no reason to believe that Mark’s author or audience had ever seen a paper map of the places mentioned in 7:31, and their cognitive map likely linked Tyre and Sidon as Gentile cities and as “evil” cities in Scripture. It does appear, however, that the Markan implied author and implied audience were aware that where Jesus and his disciples end up, the Decapolis, is in a Gentile area on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. When geography and ethnography are intertwined, that is what is important. The Markan Jesus has healed “Jews” in Galilee AND Gentiles beyond Galilee, both to the north and to the east. And the disciples have witnessed these healings.

Fifth, Jesus feeds the 4,000 in a Gentile setting. Those who are fed are not described by a Scriptural allusion but by a basic human need: "If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way" (8:3). The number of basketsful of leftover pieces is seven, the number of completeness (seven days in the week, seven planetary deities, seven deacons in Acts 6:3). The feeding of the Gentiles completes the feeding of the "Jews"; it does not supplant it. Sixth, after the feeding, Jesus and the disciples make a quick boat trip across the sea "to the district of Dalmanutha" (8:10), back on the west ("Jewish") side of the sea. If the audience is having trouble following the itinerary of place names, the second clue always helps: "The Pharisees came and began to argue with him ..." (8:11). They argue for a "sign from heaven to test him"; Jesus says "no sign will be given to this generation" (8:12). Then it's back "into the boat again" and back "across to the other side" of the Sea of Galilee (8:13).

Seventh and finally, during this Markan detour, there is an important conversation between Jesus and the disciples in the boat on the sea as they cross over from the western "Jewish" side to the eastern Gentile side of the sea—a conversation that ties together (at least for the implied audience if not for the disciples) everything that has happened on the detour, and even before it. The leitmotif is bread. "[T]he disciples had forgotten to bring any bread" (8:14). "[B]eware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod" (8:15). "It is because we have no bread" (8:16). Then, with an allusion to Isaiah, Jesus questions whether the disciples have eyes but do not see, ears but fail to understand. Bread continues in what I call "the arithmetic lesson": How many basketsful were collected from breaking bread for the 5,000, that is, for the "Jews"? Twelve. How many basketsful were collected from breaking bread for the 4,000, that is, for the Gentiles? Seven. "Do you not yet understand?" (8:21). Understanding the significance of these numbers, understanding the significance of the narrative movements during the "detour," understanding that there is enough bread and healing for "Jews" and Gentiles in the in-breaking reign of God would be a new way of seeing and hearing.¹⁴

14 Adela Yarbrow Collins considers both feedings to be set in Galilee, and she regards the two separated references to Bethsaida (6:45; 8:22) as a mark of the redactor's rearrangement of source material (*Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007], 388, 333). In addition, she does not see Bethsaida as signifying Gentiles for Mark and his audience because Bethsaida "had a significant Jewish population, at least until the first Jewish war with Rome" (*Mark*, 385 n. 66). Joel Marcus refers to Bethsaida as "a Hellenistic city with some Jewish inhabitants," but he does so in relation to John 1:44 (*Mark 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 27 [New Haven: Yale University Press,

Then “They came to Bethsaida” (8:22). The detour is over. Jesus sends the disciples ahead of him to Bethsaida at 6:45, but they do not make it on their own, even though he has shown them the way across the Sea of Galilee at 5:1–20. So, on this “detour” full of healing, teaching, and feeding both “Jews” and Gentiles, Pharisees and disciples, a Syrophenician woman’s daughter and a man from the Decapolis, Jesus leads and accompanies his disciples to Bethsaida. Some things take longer than one first thinks.

The Markan “detour” has some similarities with the detour of the prophet Jonah, who, when sent by God to the Gentiles in Nineveh, heads instead to Tarshish, in the opposite direction, by ship. Like Jesus and the disciples, his detoured voyage lands him back where he started from. Although Jesus and the disciples, unlike Jonah, have no under-sea adventures, there are intriguing narrative and verbal parallels between the story of Jonah in its Septuagintal form in the Book of the Twelve and the stories of the Markan Jesus’ three voyages across the Sea of Galilee. Examples, in addition to a “detour” when sent to a Gentile territory, include both Jonah and Jesus sleeping in the boat during a storm on the sea and being awakened by someone who asks them to do something to keep everyone from “perishing” (Mark 4:38; Jonah 1:6), as well as the sailors with Jonah and the disciples with Jesus in the boat “fearing with a great fear” (literal translation, Mark 4:41; Jonah 1:10; cf. 1:6). But Jonah does eventually arrive in Nineveh (presumably via an overland route) and preach, reluctantly but successfully, to Gentiles; and Jesus and the disciples do arrive in Bethsaida via an overland route.¹⁵

2000], 422). M. Eugene Boring refers to Bethsaida as “a mainly Gentile city on the east side of the lake,” although he does not necessarily assume the ancient audience appreciated this fact (*Mark: A Commentary*, NTL [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006], 188). The mixed population of Bethsaida in the first century is not in dispute here, only the connotative value of Bethsaida as Gentile for the implied author and audience of Mark. Not too surprisingly, Yarbro Collins does not quite know how to interpret the twelve and seven basketsful. She concludes that “The details [about the feedings] are brought into the dialogue primarily to portray the disciples as dull pupils” (*Mark*, 387). The “linking of the feedings with Jesus’ self-revelation on the sea suggests,” to Yarbro Collins, “that the issue in the dialogue of 8:17–21 [with the Isaiah allusion, and about the twelve and the seven] is the identity of Jesus” (*Mark*, 388). In my interpretation, of course, the dialogue about understanding the feedings is about understanding the feedings—about Mark’s audience understanding the two feeding stories and their implications for their on-going community of Jesus followers.

- 15 For details, see Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “Jonah, Jesus, and Gentiles across the Sea: Markan Narrative Intersections,” paper presented to *Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense*, July 2017 (to be published in the conference proceedings).

But there is still blindness to be confronted in Bethsaida: the uniquely Markan story of the two-stage healing of blindness (8:22–26), with the use of saliva (understood as “unclean” among “Jews”) serving as the second indicator of the place as Gentile. Interpreters have long connected this story with the half-sight/half-blindness of Peter in the immediately following story of Peter’s confession/confusion. However, an audience hearing and seeing Mark performed would likely connect the story of the two-stage healing of blindness at Bethsaida first to the immediately preceding story’s challenge to the disciples’ seeing/understanding in the boat on the sea. What has just happened in two stages that was reviewed in the “arithmetic lesson” in the boat? Moving out—in the ministry of healing and feeding—to include not only “Jews” but also Gentiles. “Do you not yet understand?” (8:21).

The two Markan references to Bethsaida, at 6:45 and 8:22, signal the beginning and ending of a “detour” in the narrative movements of Jesus and the disciples and provide an interlude, repeat, or coda—to use musical metaphors—of Jesus’ teaching the disciples about the implications of the expansive in-breaking reign of God. Thus, the implied author is able to add emphasis to an important point of his teaching the implied audience. Jesus’ reaction to the disciples’ failure to reach Gentile Bethsaida when sent is a gentle one, a patient one, but an insistent one. Jesus gives the disciples a second chance; he accompanies them; they do reach Bethsaida—together. Likewise, the implied author gives the implied audience a second chance; he accompanies them, hoping they too will come to Bethsaida—and see. The Markan Jesus’ approach to Gentile Bethsaida is presented by the narrator as a positive—and challenging—example for the disciples—and discipleship.

Bethsaida in Matthew and Luke: Geography and “Jewish” Non-Repentance

While Mark’s Gospel refers to Bethsaida twice in the narrative of Jesus’ movements, Matthew’s Gospel refers to Bethsaida just once, and in the speech of the character Jesus. In addition, while Bethsaida is called a “village” (*kōmē*) at Mark 8:23 and 26, Matt 11:20 seems to suggest that Bethsaida at 11:21 is considered a “city” (*polis*).¹⁶ The saying of Jesus that refers to Bethsaida comes not long after the Matthean Jesus’ second discourse, the “Missionary Discourse” addressed to the disciples (10:1–11:1), with only John’s questions to Jesus (11:2–6) and Jesus’

16 Generally, in the ancient world, “To label something a city, then, is to credit it with a certain honor status” (Stewart, *Gathered around Jesus*, 131; see 129–33.).

words about John (11:7–19) intervening. The narrator introduces the Jesus saying with this topic sentence:

Then he began to reproach the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent (11:20).

In Matthew's Gospel, "the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done" are "Jewish" cities because Matthew's narrative largely presents outreach to Gentiles as something that takes its impetus from the "Great Commission" at the close of the Gospel (28:18–20). Although Matthew does include briefer narrations of Jesus' healing of two Gardarene demoniacs (8:28–34, paralleling Mark's Gerasene demoniac) and the Canaanite woman (15:21–28, paralleling Mark's Syrophoenician woman), Matthew has a generalized healing statement in place of Mark's healing of the deaf mute in the Decapolis and alters the setting of the feeding of the 4,000 (by changing Mark 7:31) so that it is no longer a Gentile feeding as in Mark. Thus, in Matthew's Gospel, Bethsaida, is a "Jewish" city—as is Chorazin, "a first-century A.D. town in upper Galilee two miles north of Capernaum" whose "synagogue was one of the earliest in the area."¹⁷ These two "cities" are linked in the Jesus saying presented in Matthew.

But because of the narrator's introduction about cities that "did not repent," the audience is prepared to have a negative impression of the cities before they are even named by Jesus. Jesus then calls out Chorazin, Bethsaida, and especially Capernaum, which is linked to Sodom. Capernaum has an even more important role in Mark's Gospel than Bethsaida, but here we are focused on Bethsaida. Matthew 11:21–22, attributed to Jesus, reads:

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

Here the Matthean narrative utilizes the stereotypical, biblical view of Tyre and Sidon that could also be glimpsed behind the Markan text. However, the Markan narrative works against the grain of the stereotype—presenting the Syrophoenician woman in Tyre who teaches Jesus by her clever "word," with the resulting healing of a Gentile child and the teaching of the disciples and the implied audience about the expansive reign of God.

¹⁷ Paul J. Achtemeier, ed., *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1985, 1996), 177.

Matthew also references Tyre and Sidon as Jesus' location for the healing of the Canaanite woman, but in the Jesus saying in Matt 11:21, the stereotypical examples of Tyre and Sidon as evil cities function to shame Chorazin and Bethsaida as cities that have had even more reason to repent but have not done so. Such a view is consistent with the ongoing debate with "Jewish" interpreters throughout the Matthean narrative. Thus, the city of Bethsaida is presented in Jesus' words as a negative example, an example of non-repentance. This could hardly be more different from the situation of Bethsaida in Mark, where the Markan Jesus' approach to Bethsaida is presented by the narrator as a positive—and challenging—example for the disciples and discipleship.

Luke 10:13 parallels the wording of Matt 11:21 quite closely, an indication of "Q" (*Quelle*) for those who are Q-believers but for those of us who find the Farrer hypothesis a more reasonable explanation of synoptic relationships an indication that Luke knew Matthew as well as Mark. Luke does not, however, echo Matthew's introduction (Matt 11:20) of Jesus' saying, and Luke does not link Capernaum specifically with Sodom as Matthew does, although Luke still makes reference to Sodom (Luke 10:12; paralleling Matt 10:15) just before the Jesus saying. Luke incorporates this Jesus saying into the Lukan Jesus' sending out of the seventy "to every town and place where he himself intended to go" (10:1). But, like Matthew, Luke assumes that Bethsaida is a "city" because the repeated use of the term *polis* in Luke 10:8, 10, 11, and 12 sets up the audience to understand Bethsaida as a city in 10:13. (Luke also calls Bethsaida a city directly in 9:10.) And, like Matthew, Luke assumes that Bethsaida is a "Jewish" city and can serve as a negative example, that is, an example of non-repentance. In its Lukan setting, this Jesus saying serves as a warning to the seventy that they will not be successful with everyone in "Jewish" cities, a view consistent throughout Luke-Acts. Finally, like Matthew, Luke has its own way of incorporating the outreach of the Jesus movement to Gentiles into the story: the Book of Acts!¹⁸

Neither Matthew nor Luke accepts Mark's way of folding a Gentile outreach back onto the ministry of Jesus in a symbolic way,¹⁹ especially in the "detour"

18 Cf. Mark Goodacre, commenting on why Luke agrees with Matthew in not including "for all Gentiles" (which would seem to be "congenial" to Luke's redaction) in his quotation of Isa 56:7 at Luke 19:46 (// Matt 21:13 // Mark 11:17): "Perhaps, though, Luke's preference for Matthew relates to Luke's salvation history, with Gentiles kept off the scene until Acts" ("The Evangelists' Use of the Old Testament and the Synoptic Problem," in *New Studies in the Synoptic Problem—Oxford Conference, April 2008: Essays in Honour of Christopher M. Tuckett*, ed. P. Foster, A. Gregory, J. S. Kloppenborg, J. Verheyden [Leuven: Peeters, 2011], 281–98, quotation from 291).

19 Because of his extensive geographical and historical knowledge of ancient Galilee, as well as his appreciation of narrative criticism, I am delighted to cite Seán Freyne's statement

section with its healing and feeding stories on both sides of the Sea of Galilee, which serves as an ideational (not political) boundary between “Jewish” and Gentile areas.²⁰ In fact, Luke goes even further than Matthew in making changes in the Markan source at this point. The Lukan “Great Omission” corresponds exactly with the Markan “detour.” Where Mark alludes, symbolically, within Jesus’ earthly ministry, to the Gentile outreach that seems to have developed after Jesus’ death, Luke omits that entire section and shows the movement out to Gentiles in greater detail in Acts. The Markan “detour” begins at 6:45 with Jesus sending the disciples “ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida.” Luke’s omitted passages begin precisely at this point and continue through Mark 8:22–26, the two-stage healing of the blind man at Bethsaida. Thus, Luke excises Markan material between Mark’s two references to Bethsaida.²¹ And Luke gives a signal of its excision in the narrator’s only reference to Bethsaida in Luke 9:10b, “He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida.” This statement serves as Luke’s introduction to the feeding of the 5,000, which is clearly a feeding of “Jews” in Luke, another indication that Luke presumes

on this topic: “Unlike many contemporary writers Mark does not separate the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith and consequently he can present the ministry of Jesus’ ‘doing good’ in Galilee in the light of the Easter faith in Jesus just as the present life of the church can be reflected in the problems and difficulties of the original group of followers” (*Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 323 B.C.E. to 135 C.E.* [Wilmington: Michael Glazier and Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1980], 359).

- 20 See my work cited in footnote 12 above. Contrasting “space in narrative” in film and verbal narrative, Buchholz and Jahn note, “In verbal narrative, however, spatial features are usually invoked by tracing the visible boundaries and referring to obstructions and typical or characteristic objects” (“Space in Narrative,” 553).
- 21 In relation to Mark 8:11–13, the passage about the Pharisees (in Dalmanutha, 8:10) seeking a “sign” from Jesus, and part of the Markan “detour,” Matthew and Luke have partial parallels to Mark in two separate places: Matt 12:38–42 // Luke 11:29–32, about the “sign of Jonah,” and Matt 16:1–4 // Luke 12:54–56, about interpreting signs of the weather. But Luke, uniquely, incorporates into his narration of the Beelzebul controversy at Luke 11:16, “Others, to test him, kept demanding from him a sign from heaven,” paralleling Mark 8:11: “The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him” (cf. Matt 16:1), giving us perhaps another indication that Luke knew and excised the Markan “detour,” saving just the desired bits that could be relocated. Luke also incorporates “Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, that is, their hypocrisy,” a variation on Mark 8:15 and Matt 16:6, both in the boat conversation scene, into the discourse against the Pharisees, having skipped the boat scene in which the line occurs as part of the Markan “detour.” In addition, having skipped all the Markan scenes and geographical markers leading up to it, Luke also drops “Caesarea Philippi” from the narration of Peter’s confession at Luke 9:18–22 (/ Mark 8:27–33 // Matt 16:13–23).

Bethsaida is a “Jewish” city.²² Obviously, I would not subscribe to a theory that Luke’s “Great Omission” would be best explained by reliance on a “deficient” copy of Mark, one missing some pages. What is omitted from Mark in Luke is consistent with Luke as a whole, and the Lukan narrator’s one Bethsaida reference marks the place where the Markan “detour” (from Bethsaida at 6:45 to Bethsaida at 8:22) would appear had it been included from its source.

Matthew and Luke are also similar in making changes in their Markan source that reduce their connections to the Jonah story. For example, in its condensed version of Mark’s second sea voyage story (Matt 14:22–27), Matthew eliminates Mark’s reference to Bethsaida, which eliminates the characterization of the second voyage as a detour—and thus eliminates reverberations with the story of Jonah’s detoured sea voyage. Luke goes even further than Matthew in distancing itself from the Jonah allusions of their shared Markan source; only one of the three Markan sea voyages remains, in a compressed form (Luke 8:22–25), and much of the vocabulary Mark shares with the LXX Jonah is missing, including “sea” (*thalassa*). Interestingly enough, Matthew, followed closely by Luke, focuses on the theme of repentance in the book of Jonah (as Matthew, with Luke following, did in relation to Bethsaida): “The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!” (Matt 12:41; Luke 11:32).²³

Each of the Synoptic Gospels deals in its own way with the story of the relationship between the Jesus movement’s outreach to Gentiles and the earthly ministry of Jesus. It is the basic way of responding to this overarching reality that seems to influence how Bethsaida functions in each Gospel. In Mark, Bethsaida represents such outreach to Gentiles, hard-taught through the movements and deeds of Jesus in the company of the disciples. In Matthew and Luke, Bethsaida represents, rather, “Jewish” non-responsiveness or even rejection, harshly taught in the words of Jesus to the disciples. It is possible, as the work of Mason has suggested, that ethnic shifts in the actual population of Bethsaida lie behind these Gospels in ways that permit (or require) them to figure the connotation of Bethsaida differently. It is also possible—and even likely—that neither the authors nor the audiences of these texts based their

22 Roger Aus picks up on this Lukan reading, as well as the references to Bethsaida in John’s Gospel, as he explores the Judaic background of the feeding story in *Feeding the Five Thousand: Studies in the Judaic Background of Mark 6:30–44 par. and John 6:1–15* (Studies in Judaism; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2010), Chapter XI, “Bethsaida as a Possible Site of the Feeding, and the Livia/Julia Cult,” 116–25.

23 For details, see Malbon, “Jonah, Jesus, and Gentiles across the Sea.”

connotations on accurate historical data. It is the narratives themselves, in their overall patterns and narrative “logic,” that give us latter-day interpreters the best clues to what the ancient authors and audiences imagined.

Bethsaida in John: Geography and a New History

Bethsaida is mentioned twice in the Gospel of John: 1:44 and 12:21, both with reference to Andrew, Peter, and Philip. “Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter” (1:44). “They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus’” (12:21). Although I am quite embedded in Markan space, I rely on Alan Culpepper for a generalization about Johannine geography:

It is difficult to tell how much familiarity with Galilee is assumed. Bethsaida is specified as the home town of Andrew and Peter (1:44; 12:21). There is no effort to locate Nazareth (1:45) or Capernaum (2:12; 4:46; 6:59), and Cana is simply “in Galilee” (2:1; 4:46). Their locations are either assumed to be known or regarded as unimportant in the story.... Although there is no effort to situate the Galilean towns in relation to each other or the Sea of Galilee, there is no evidence that the reader is familiar with their locations. What evidence there is, and it is not much, points in the other direction. The reader(s) do not seem to be familiar with Galilean locations, though they may have heard some of their names before.

... Our tentative conclusion is that the readers know the general regions but not specific locations.... The geography of the gospel is well known to the narrator but not to the reader.²⁴

I am willing, however, to offer these comparative observations. Like Matthew and Luke, and unlike Mark, John refers to Bethsaida as a “city.” And like Matthew and Luke, and unlike Mark, John apparently assumes Bethsaida is a “Jewish” city; it is after all the home of Peter, Andrew, and Philip! The disciples, of course, like Jesus, are “Jews,” but this is not stressed in John. John is unlike the Synoptics in associating Peter and Andrew not with Capernaum but with Bethsaida.

The term “Jews” (*Ioudaios*) is, of course, particularly problematic in John’s Gospel, being used of the authorities opposed to Jesus as if it did not also apply, in some way, to Jesus and his disciples, and this issue is way beyond the scope

24 Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth*, 216–17, 218.

of my present exploration.²⁵ Within my focus on Bethsaida, I note that John is distinctive among the canonical Gospels in stating explicitly that Bethsaida is part of Galilee. It may be that Bethsaida had only recently been added to Galilee at the time of John's writing and the purpose of the additional phrase "in Galilee" was to emphasize the recent assignment of Bethsaida to this region.²⁶ Mason shows that "there is a clear definitive shift of the presumed location of Bethsaida into Galilee from the time of Josephus and Pliny to the time of Ptolemy."²⁷ Ptolemy, writing throughout his life between 90 and 168 CE, illustrates that "society viewed Bethsaida not only as part of Galilee" but also as "one of the few cities mentioned in Galilee, suggesting that it was probably well known that Bethsaida was in Galilee at this point in time."²⁸

So, John's marking of "Bethsaida" as "in Galilee" would seem to call attention to it as less Gentile and thus more "Jewish." However, "Jews" are marked as opponents of Jesus in John's Gospel, and a new community of disciples, centered around Jesus, is brought to the fore without focusing on the "Jewishness" of its members. It is almost as if the geography of Bethsaida is taken over and given a new history, not as Gentile, not as specifically "Jewish," not as unrepentant, but as the new home of three foundational disciples of the new Jesus movement: Andrew, Peter, and Philip. A new story is being told against the backdrop of Bethsaida.

Mark's Gentile village of Bethsaida becomes Matthew and Luke's "Jewish"—and unrepentant—city of Bethsaida, which becomes John's city of the disciples of Jesus, who is portrayed as over against "the Jews." "Bethsaida in Galilee" is given a new history, a history that is surprising even to others in John's Gospel. Some in the crowd ask, "Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he?" (7:41). And some Pharisees say to Nicodemus, "Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee" (7:52). But a new prophet does arise from Galilee, and, Bethsaida, like Galilee, has a new place in history in John's Gospel. The Jesus movement, not yet labeled "Christian," is creating a new geography and a new history.

25 See Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 125–32, and also 219–22. See also R. Alan Culpepper, "Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel as a Problem for Christian Interpreters," in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt, and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 61–82, and R. Alan Culpepper, "Inclusivism and Exclusivism in the Fourth Gospel," in *Word, Theology and Community in John*, ed. John Painter. R. Alan Culpepper, and Fernando F. Segovia (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002), 85–108.

26 Mason, "Bethsaida in the Gospels," 716.

27 Mason, "Bethsaida in the Gospels," 719.

28 Mason, "Bethsaida in the Gospels," 719.

Placing Bethsaida

Although the place name Bethsaida occurs in all four canonical Gospels, I would certainly not argue that Bethsaida is of equal importance in each of the Gospel narratives. It seems to me most important in Mark's narrative—and I do not think that is just because I am a Markan scholar—and more incidental in Matthew, Luke, and John. And because Bethsaida plays less of a role in Matthew, Luke, and John, I have less assurance about my interpretations of Bethsaida in these Gospels. Yet looking at Bethsaida in each of the Gospels reminds us of their distinctive authors, audiences, circumstances, and goals.

While it is helpful to learn what we can about geography and history external to the canonical Gospels in order to understand them in their first-century contexts, especially in relation to a place name like Bethsaida, in order to understand what and how the implied authors of the Gospels were trying to communicate with their implied audiences we must attend to the internal relations of each narrative. As Alan Culpepper writes in the Preface to the Paperback Edition of *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, "In keeping with the guiding concern of the volume, attention is focused on literary rather than historical matters, and a comprehensive design is proposed."²⁹

It is intriguing that Mark, Matthew and Luke, and John manifest in their narratives different assumptions about Bethsaida. In each of these Gospels, Bethsaida is implicated in some way in the development of the Jesus movement from a small movement within "Judaism" to a "Jewish" movement that reaches out to Gentiles, to a movement that, before long, breaks with its "Jewish" roots. In Mark's Gospel, Gentile Bethsaida marks the beginning and ending points of a "detour," during which Jesus guides the disciples in moving out from healing and feeding "Jews" to also healing and feeding Gentiles. Thus, Bethsaida is presented by the narrator as a positive goal and model for discipleship. In Matthew and Luke, such outward movement to Gentiles is manifest differently—and later in the story (in the Great Commission in Matthew and in the Book of Acts for Luke)—and Bethsaida serves as a negative example of an unrepentant "Jewish" city in Gospels that are engaged in internal struggles as the Jesus movement, born within a Hellenized "Jewish" context, tries to find its own footing. In John, a greater separation seems to have occurred, and Bethsaida has become the city of Peter and Andrew and Philip, disciples of Jesus—a new city separated, as it were, from both its Gentile and its "Jewish" past—in a new movement over against "the Jews." Thus, when examining the narratives in detail and in relation to each other, not only the individual

29 Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, xi.

distinctions of the Gospels but also their interrelationships, their changes from one to another, are revealing.

For this reason, historical and geographical knowledge about Bethsaida alone is insufficient for understanding the Gospels, both individually and as part of the New Testament canon. In the twenty-first century, we are easily able to have “better” (that is, more detailed and accurate) historical and geographical information than the ancient authors and audiences we study. And we are fortunate to be so well informed. However, what we need to appreciate in order to interpret their works is what they knew, what they presupposed, what they imagined. Looking carefully at their narratives (and additional ancient narratives) and remembering that ancient audiences heard and viewed them performed rather than read them silently is our best guide in this unending, yet intriguing, task. And, on this path, Alan Culpepper has been a trailblazer.

Teaching the Gospel of Mark in Rome

Robert M. Fowler

In January 2014, I received an email purporting to be from a professor in the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome: Dear Professor Fowler, would you like to come to Rome for a semester to teach a course on the Gospel of Mark? I like to joke that at first I thought this was an email scam, but in fact I did recognize the name of the professor, Jean-Noël Aletti, S. J. We had had a brief email correspondence seven years earlier, and remarkably I had saved those emails and was able to find them. He had reached out to me hoping to find an obscure essay that I published decades ago, at the beginning of my career. He was writing on behalf of a doctoral student of his who was working on Mark, and apparently the student was diligently tracking down everything I had ever published. I found the essay in my office, scanned it to PDF, and emailed it to Jean-Noël. I gave it no further thought until seven years later when we were once again in touch, this time to talk about a possible visit to Rome. Lesson of the story: answer your email and try to be helpful, if possible. You'll never know where it might lead.

Professor Aletti made clear from the start that the invitation to me was made because my approach to the Gospel of Mark (literary criticism, broadly speaking, and reader-response criticism, in particular) was not practiced much within the Pontifical Biblical Institute (hereafter, the “Biblicum”). What I had to offer to them was largely novel and therefore of great interest. This was not a complete surprise to me because I have attended the international meetings of the *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas* off and on for many years, initially as an invited guest and later as a member. Although the newer “literary” approaches to the New Testament have been somewhat in evidence within SNTS for decades,¹ it has always been clear that the older historical, philological, and theological approaches to the New Testament still dominate within SNTS. Therefore, it was not a surprise that the same situation obtained in Rome.

1 From 1985–1989, I was fortunate to be able to participate in a daring non-traditional SNTS seminar on “The Role of the Reader in the Interpretation of the New Testament.” This was a tremendous encouragement to me as I was writing my magnum opus, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991, 2001—paperback edition).

Once I got over the initial shock of receiving an invitation that I could never have imagined receiving, and once my wife and I had worked out the logistics of our stay in Rome, I was happy to accept the invitation of the Biblicum to teach a graduate-level course that I called “The Gospel of Mark as Story.”

In the following pages, I would like to share some of my experiences teaching the Gospel of Mark in Rome and also to reflect on the curious situation within New Testament studies internationally, wherein we are sometimes aware of what our colleagues in distant lands are doing in their scholarship but too often we are not. As a sometime student of irony, I find it deeply ironic that the kind of literary approach that I have taken to Mark for forty years is now perceived to be routine in the U.S., but abroad it is still perceived as rather innovative. I offer these reflections here in celebration of the long, distinguished career of Alan Culpepper, whose pioneering work on the literary criticism of the Gospel of John was instrumental in establishing the literary criticism of the gospels as “routine,” at least in the U.S.²

Before explaining what I did in my course, I first need to explain who my students were and what kind of practical constraints I faced in the classroom. The students in the Biblicum come from over sixty countries. There were twenty-eight students in my class, from thirteen different countries (Pakistan, Philippines, Indonesia, Slovakia, Thailand, Nigeria, South Africa, Spain, Bangladesh, South Korea, India, France, Italy). Most of the students were from somewhere in Africa or Asia; only a handful were from Europe; none came from the Americas, which surprised me a little, in part because of my fresh memory that Pope Francis came to Rome from Argentina. Most of the courses at the Biblicum are taught in Italian, but there are also many, including mine, taught in English. My limited language skills precluded me from even dreaming of teaching in any language other than English.

Since those twenty-eight students from thirteen countries signed up for a course taught in English, they obviously had some facility with English, even though very few (and perhaps none) had English as their mother tongue. Therefore, for the majority of the students in my class, English could easily have been their second, third, or fourth modern language. Regarding their knowledge of biblical languages, I will have much more to say later.

My students were a little shy about speaking up in class, perhaps in part out of deference to my professorial authority, but more likely simply out of reluctance to put their spoken English on display. If the situation had been reversed and I had been a student taking a graduate-level course taught in Italian,

2 R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

I would have been greatly challenged, first simply to understand what was being said in class, but then also to find the appropriate words in Italian with which to express my comments or questions.³ Thus I have nothing but the highest respect and sympathy for the students who were challenged by the spoken and written English in my course. The diversity of cultures and languages in evidence in my class, and in the *Biblicum* generally, was beyond anything I have ever experienced before.

The primary means of evaluating student performance in my course was the submission of a modest-sized research paper at the end of the semester. Since I was teaching the course in English, my assumption from the beginning had been that the students would submit their papers in English. Then, one day an Italian student, who readily confessed that his spoken and written English was weak, approached me and asked if he could write his paper in Italian. That caught me off guard; I didn't know how to respond. If I made that allowance for him (I can read Italian, slowly), would I be expected to allow the Korean students to write in Korean (impossible for me), or the Indian students to write in whichever language of India they preferred (also impossible)? I quickly turned to the Dean of the *Biblicum* for advice, and he provided some helpful context for responding to this request.

He explained that there are five modern languages in common use within the *Biblicum* (i.e., Italian, English, French, German, and Spanish), and the permanent members of the faculty are expected to accept submissions of student work written in any of these five languages. Since I was a visiting professor, however, I was not held to this expectation, so it was acceptable for me to ask for papers in English only. I have actually studied Italian, French, German, and Spanish, but my functional grasp of them is less than stellar, and slogging my way through twenty-eight papers written in these languages would have been an excruciatingly slow, painful process. Thus, begging my students for forgiveness, I asked them to submit their papers in English. There were no further requests for an exception, and the majority of the papers I received were written in respectable English. In honesty, however, there were a few that displayed significantly weak skill in English, but as long as I could comprehend what these students were trying to say, I tried hard to be generous in my evaluation

3 This imagined role reversal was not entirely out of the realm of the possible. Since two and a half years passed between my initial invitation to come to Rome and my arrival there, I had the opportunity to take two years of formal instruction in Italian at my university. I was not going to spend a semester in Rome knowing no Italian! When I arrived in Rome, I was comfortable reading Italian, reciting a street address to a taxi driver, or saying "*il conto, per favore!*" to a waiter, but my conversational skills were weak.

of their work. I kept reminding myself, how would I do if roles were reversed and I were writing for them in *italiano*?

Another anecdote about language within the Biblicum: During the first week of class, a Mass was celebrated to mark the beginning of the new school year. The Mass was conducted in Italian and Latin. Scripture readings were read in Hebrew and Greek. The homily was delivered in Italian. The Prayers of the Faithful were read by Biblicum students in their native Spanish, French, Rwandan, Italian, English, Vietnamese, Bengali, and Slovak. All of the hymns, scripture readings, and prayers were printed in the program in the appropriate language. For the less familiar languages, translations in Italian were also provided. Such was my formal introduction to the cosmopolitan, international, multi-lingual ethos of the Biblicum.

Shifting from modern to biblical languages, one of the professors in the Biblicum explained to me the language expectations for students seeking advanced degrees in biblical studies. First of all, everyone has to master Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.⁴ In addition, everyone has to do a fourth language that is somehow related to the Bible. My source said that when he was a student at the Biblicum, he chose “Egyptian” (i.e., Coptic?) as his fourth language. Other students might choose Ugaritic, Akkadian, Syriac, or whatever. Of course, it being Rome and the Roman Catholic tradition, everyone had to know Latin. So the standard expectation for ancient, Bible-related languages is five languages. Regarding modern languages, master’s students are encouraged to obtain reading ability in three modern European languages, Italian, English, and either French or German. Doctoral students are expected to be able to read four languages. All will be conversationally fluent in Italian, of course, and surely also English. Several times I heard comments about students going off to spend time in another country for several months, to take a crash course in that country’s predominant language. The easiest of these modern languages to pick up would surely be Italian, since students are studying in Rome for a number of years.

4 I arrived at the University of Chicago at a time when the faculty were excusing PhD candidates in New Testament from studying Aramaic, unless we needed it for our dissertation research, so I ‘got by’ with only Hebrew and Greek for biblical languages, and reading exams in French and German, all of which are extremely modest expectations compared to those in the Biblicum. The instant I arrived at Chicago, I plunged into introductory Biblical Hebrew, taught at Chicago’s Oriental Institute. I had already studied Greek before coming to Chicago. By contrast, if a student arrives at the Biblicum without knowing either Hebrew or Greek, it is customary for the student to be plunged into introductory Hebrew and Greek, *simultaneously*, something that I can hardly imagine.

So, let's do a tally: five ancient, Bible-related languages. Reading knowledge of at least three or four modern European languages. Conversational ability in Italian and English, at minimum, along with whatever other languages they might learn in Europe or that they might have brought with them from their country of origin.⁵ In sum, I estimate that the advanced students in the *Biblicum* have some facility with a minimum of ten languages, some ancient and some modern. When I compare myself to them, I hang my head in shame.⁶

A few more comments on the practical logistics of my course, and then at last I'll turn to "Mark as story." The classroom logistics of my course in Rome were quite different from what I encounter at home. Most of my teaching ordinarily is at the undergraduate level, indeed, at the introductory undergraduate level. In Rome I was dealing with graduate students, many of whom already had a master's degree, and all of whom were proficient in Greek. That's a luxury I had never before encountered in my career! Semesters at home are fifteen weeks in length; at the *Biblicum*, they ran twelve weeks. At home I am usually in class three days a week for fifty minutes; in Rome, it was twice a week, for forty-five minutes. I was informed even before I came to Rome that I could not expect students to do a huge amount of reading in preparation for each class. Given the fact that for most of the students, English was not their mother tongue, this made sense. Compounding this situation was the fact that my course was a five-ECTS ("European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System") credit course, a full course load for a semester would typically be thirty ECTS credits, and therefore students who were taking my course could easily have been taking five other courses of similar weight at the same time. Six courses in a semester are far more than I ever attempted in grad school.

5 I wish now I had taken a poll of my students, asking them about the range of languages they could handle. It would have been fascinating to discover what languages they brought with them before ever setting foot in Rome.

6 That I am not genuinely fluent in any of the modern languages that I have studied is one of the great disappointments of my life. However, I can hack my way through a text written in a number of different languages, and I know how to order beer or wine in several languages, a useful skill for good living. I get by in those increasingly rare places in the world where English is not spoken. However, I grieve for my fellow Americans, especially the monolingual ones who get angry when the recorded greeting on the telephone prompts them to "press 1 for English." They act as if English should be the only language ever used in the U.S., or maybe even in the world. Such a narrow outlook on the human experience saddens me. Every language I have ever studied, every visit I have ever made to a restaurant or a shop where English is not spoken, has made my world larger and made me a better person. I wish my fellow Americans, especially the monolingual ones, would embrace every opportunity to expand their horizons in this way.

Once I comprehended this aspect of their daily challenges in course preparation, my admiration for the students only grew.

Given these severe constraints, in class I mostly lectured on the basics of narrative and reader-response criticism, which was, I was constantly reminded, the reason for my invitation to Rome. I regularly invited student questions and comments, but regrettably there was little time for that. A few students did distinguish themselves by the quality of their questions, which made me wish that the logistics of the course would allow for more exchanges like that. There was definitely no time available for a thorough analysis of Mark's story from beginning to end. We had to be content to do the best we could with the limited time and opportunity we had.

So, how did we tackle "The Gospel of Mark as Story"? The very first thing I did in the course was to require all of the students to view a video of a live performance of the Gospel of Mark. I had arranged to bring with me digitized videos of well-known performances of Mark by Alec McCowen and David Rhoads.⁷ Before showing excerpts of both performances in class, I made the following solemn proclamation: *"If you have never experienced Mark from beginning to end as an oral performance, then you have never experienced the Gospel of Mark!"* Any performance of Mark is too long to show in a single class meeting, so I asked the students to finish one of the performances on their own outside of class and to send me a brief response by email. The students were universally impressed and intrigued by the performances. In our class discussion of the experience, I asked for a show of hands from those who had previously experienced an oral performance of Mark (or for that matter, any other biblical text). *Not one student raised a hand.* Twenty-eight students from all over the world, and not one of them had ever experienced a book of the Bible in oral performance. Since I and many of my colleagues in the U.S. have taken for granted for decades that of course biblical texts were written to be performed aloud, this was a stunning moment. Moreover, I had been assuming that surely some of my students from Africa or Asia probably came from

7 Alec McCowen, "St. Mark's Gospel," <https://amzn.to/2Iem6xP>. I am not sure that the David Rhoads performance, originally distributed on VHS videotape, is still available, but this is the original publication information: David Rhoads, "Dramatic Performance of the Gospel of Mark." Available from: SELECT, c/o Trinity Lutheran Seminary, 2199 E. Main Street, Columbus, OH 43209-2334, 614-235-4136. Another polished performance of Mark is also now available in video: Philip L. Ruge-Jones, "The Beginning of the Good News: A Live Performance of Mark's Gospel," <https://bit.ly/2jb6dft>. The same performance is also available on YouTube, broken up into the sixteen chapters of Mark; for Mark 1, see <https://bit.ly/2lCQBg5>.

cultures with enduring traditions of oral storytelling, so I was surprised that no one had ever experienced oral performance of biblical texts. Surely they had heard or had performed themselves isolated Bible stories, but they had definitely never sat through a complete hour and forty-five-minute performance of Mark. From time to time during the semester I pondered what my twenty-eight students from thirteen countries might take back home from my course. It warmed my heart to realize that some of them might go home eager to share the experience of oral performance of biblical texts with their faith communities. If they got nothing else from their time with me in Rome, that alone would have been worth the time and effort.

With that immersion into Mark's story behind us, the job for the rest of the semester became to introduce the students to the basics of narrative and reader-response criticism. I submitted a list of recommended readings to the Biblicum's extraordinary library, but given the limited number of pages I could expect students to read day by day, I chose only three required texts: Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (second edition); David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (third edition); and my own, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark*.⁸

Since the expanded, second edition of the Anderson and Moore volume, *Mark and Method*, now includes treatments of a wide array of approaches to narrative analysis of Mark, including Deconstructive Criticism, Feminist Criticism, Social Criticism, Cultural Studies, and Postcolonial Criticism, I briefly entertained the hope that we might find a way to run through most of these. However, given the constraints on student time and energy, I quickly abandoned that idea. I chose to be content with a careful reading of Elizabeth Struthers Malbon's chapter on Narrative Criticism and my own chapter on Reader-Response Criticism.

Malbon's chapter, on the first of the methods explored in the volume, was the ideal introduction to the basics of narrative criticism for serious Bible students who had never before encountered narrative criticism. Malbon deftly introduces such basic notions as story and discourse in narrative, the implied author and implied reader, the possible value of distinguishing between the implied author and the narrator of a narrative, characters, settings, plot, and

8 Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2d ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008); David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3d ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012); Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*.

the rhetoric of the narration. Malbon ends her chapter with a stroll through Mark 4–8, illustrating the use of the concepts with which she began the chapter. I asked the students to study her analysis of Mark 4–8 and to write a brief response, which elicited some encouraging early observations about Mark's narrative techniques.

It has always felt natural to me that my chapter on reader-response criticism follows Malbon's chapter in *Mark and Method*. I have practiced reader-response criticism since my days in graduate school, when I dared to employ it in my doctoral dissertation, *Loaves and Fishes*.⁹ The kind of narratological insights pursued in Malbon's chapter, and especially the idea that the implied author/narrator is wielding rhetorical strategies to persuade the implied reader/narratee, are crucial for reader-response criticism. In my chapter in *Mark and Method*, I stress what has always seemed most interesting and important to me in pursuit of the reader's response, namely, the temporal experience of reading. In this chapter I introduce and give examples of important metaphors that reader-response critics employ to talk about their own experience of reading: looking forward/looking back, filling gaps, reconstruction, the self-consuming artifact, and resisting reading. I conclude the chapter with an examination of what I argue to be Matthew's resisting reading of Mark's empty tomb story. Once again, I asked students to respond to this, and a number of insightful comments were offered. After reading Malbon on Mark 4–8 and me on Mark 16, a number of students had already identified topics for the research papers that I was requiring them to write.

From *Mark and Method*, we moved on to Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*. This was the only required text that we had time to read and discuss from cover to cover. It would be impossible to summarize here the richness of insight found in this book, so it will have to suffice to observe that this is surely the definitive treatment of narrative criticism within gospel studies, and it is understandable that its enduring influence would provide opportunity for it to metamorphose through three different editions, from its original appearance in 1982, to the most recent version in 2012.¹⁰ No doubt our careful reading

9 Robert M. Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes: The Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark*, SBLDS 54 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1981; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006).

10 David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982); David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 2d ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999); idem, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3d ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012). A noteworthy celebration of the influence

of this work over the course of some weeks was the most helpful preparation students had for pursuing their research projects.

The end of the semester was rapidly approaching by the time we were able to give some attention to my own *Let the Reader Understand*. I wish that it could have been otherwise, but running close to three hundred pages of small print, there was only time to give attention to what I call Mark's "rhetoric of direction," found mostly in the form of "reliable commentary" offered by the narrator to the narratee. Mark's even more intriguing "rhetoric of indirection" (i.e., irony, paradox, ambiguity, and so on) had to fall by the wayside. A few eager students were able to explore some of this material on their own, and I had already made a gesture toward Wayne Booth's metaphor of the "reconstruction" of irony in my *Mark and Method* chapter,¹¹ so I was able to entice the students with some of the items on the dinner menu that we were not going to be able to taste in all of their richness. *Che peccato!*

By the middle of the semester we were actively discussing topics for research papers. I held regular office hours, and I was gratified that the students took advantage of that. It was apparent on many occasions that the students appreciated the opportunity to learn new approaches to biblical interpretation with which they were not familiar. Clearly, they all came to my course with expertise in standard, traditional forms of biblical exegesis, but narrative criticism and reader-response criticism were new to them. Of course, not everyone was able to perform at the highest level—English was a challenge for many!—but by the end of the semester, on the whole, I was very pleased with the papers I received.¹² Here is just a sample of their titles:

- Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman in Mark 7:24–30: A Narrative Critical Study
- An Exposé of the Rhetorical Techniques Employed by the Narrator in the Healing Story in Mark 5:21–43

and longevity of *Mark as Story* was published in 2011: Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner, eds., *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011).

11 Robert M. Fowler, "Reader-Response Criticism: Figuring Mark's Reader," in *Mark and Method* (2008), 74–79.

12 Something else that was alien to me was the grading system that I was asked to use. Not the ABC grades of the American system, but instead a ten-point system, with ten being the highest grade. I had several conversations with the faculty and staff of the Biblicum about this, and I hope I dealt fairly with the students!

- Mark's Strategies for the Message on the Forgiveness of Sins: Considering the Episode of Mk 2:1–12 with Reader-Response Criticism
- A Reader-Response Study of the Sea of Galilee in Mark 6:47–52
- The Scribes as Foils to Jesus: A Study of the Narrative Role of the Scribes in Mark's Gospel Story (40 pages in length; I suggested it should be expanded into a monograph!)
- The Irony of Flight: A Narrative Approach to Mark 16:7 in the Light of the Predictions in 14:27–31
- A Hearer's Response to Jesus' Aramaic (written by a doctoral candidate, this paper demonstrated an impressive knowledge of Aramaic and other aspects of language in antiquity)
- Bartimaeus: The Ideal Markan Disciple
- The Disciples' Lack of Understanding of Jesus' Mission and Blind Bartimaeus: Unpacking Mark's Narrative Rhetorical Styles in Mark 10:35–52
- The Characterization of Jesus in the Stilling of the Storm (Mk 4:35–41): A Narrative-Critical Analysis
- The Markan Empty Tomb (62 pages!)
- The Blind One Begins to See, the One with Sight becomes Blind: A Narrative Approach to the Two Blind Men's Stories in Mark 8:22–26 and 10:46–52

To bring these reflections to a close, it was an opportunity of a lifetime to be able to teach the Gospel of Mark in the city in which tradition says it may have been written. Periodically in my classroom, I would joke with the students, asking when one of them would take me to see the apartment in Rome in which Mark wrote his gospel. Alas, if anyone possessed that esoteric knowledge, it was never divulged. However, I did have several other opportunities to go looking for the spirit of St. Mark.

- My wife and I made several visits to the Vatican Museums, the Sistine Chapel, and St. Peter's Basilica, which is located on the site where tradition says that Peter, the mentor of Mark, was martyred by order of Emperor Nero in the 60s CE.
- One of my earnest desires was to visit the Vatican Library to lay eyes on Codex Vaticanus, the fourth century CE Greek manuscript of the whole Bible that famously ends Mark at 16:8. With the aid of the staff at the Biblicum, I was able to gain entrance to the Vatican Library (its security measures are stringent), but I was informed that no one, not even a distinguished visiting Markan scholar, is allowed to view the original manuscript. The best they could offer me was to examine a nice facsimile edition, which I happily did

for an hour, but it was rather like kissing one's lover through a veil. Nice, but it could have been much nicer.¹³

- Since I count myself among those who discern in Mark's "Little Apocalypse" (Mark 13) echoes of the actual historical circumstances in which the gospel was written ("wars and rumors of wars" [13:7] and the destruction of the Temple [13:1–2]), I probably felt haunted by Mark the most when we visited the Colosseum and the Arch of Titus leading into the Roman Forum. The building of the Colosseum was funded by the spoils taken by the Roman legions from the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Perhaps a hundred thousand Jewish slaves were put to work quarrying the stone and building the amphitheater. The Arch of Titus famously portrays the victory procession celebrating the Roman victory over the Jewish rebels, complete with the menorah and other sacred objects looted from the Jewish Temple.
- Also, I knew I had to visit the legendary final resting place of St. Mark, in the Basilica di San Marco, situated on the Piazza San Marco in Venice. My teaching obligations required me to be in class two days every week, which limited the excursions we were able to make outside of Rome. However, we were able to take a fast train from Rome to Venice to spend a long weekend there. I paid homage to San Marco in his sarcophagus under the altar.

In conclusion, a word of appreciation for Alan Culpepper and his long, distinguished career. Twenty-four years separate Alan's landmark monograph on John, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, and his one big book on Mark, a 600-page commentary in the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary series.¹⁴ I cannot help but be struck by the differences in genre and in the angle of approach taken in the two volumes. The book on John is a monograph that in its day broke new ground in the literary analysis of the gospels. Twenty-four years later the book on Mark is a more traditional commentary, offering historical and theological insights alongside of observations of how Mark functions as story. An additional, telling feature of the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary series is its offering of "Connections" at the end of each chapter of Mark. One might fairly call these sermon notes, and the commentary series is clearly intended to serve preachers and teachers in Christian faith communities. Alan is one of the editors of this series, and clearly he has embraced the aims and purposes of this

13 Codex Vaticanus (Codex B) is available online at https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.1209. The ending of Mark may be seen on page 1303.

14 R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2007).

commentary series as the determining factors for his Mark commentary. But what strikes me most of all is that in Alan's Mark commentary, as in other Mark commentaries I have examined in recent years, hard-won literary insights into Mark have been absorbed and assimilated into the familiar philological, historical, cultural, and theological interests of the standard commentary genre. Since I can look around and see evidence of the success of the narrative criticism of the gospels here, there, and almost everywhere within gospel studies, I have sometimes told myself that "narrative criticism won." But now I have second thoughts about that. Having been to Rome and having *introduced* twenty-eight international students to narrative and reader-response criticism of Mark for the first time, I am less sanguine than I used to be about the successes of our newer "literary" approaches to the gospels. The successes of literary approaches to the gospels internationally are certainly less than here in the U.S. Even so, I planted some seeds, and the farmer's son that I am hopes for a yield of thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold.

From Markan Narrative in Print to Markan Narrative in Performance: A Paradigm Shift

David Rhoads

Biblical performance criticism is the study of the oral telling of traditions in the biblical world. It seeks to re-imagine ancient Israel and the early church as predominantly oral and memory cultures, to construct scenarios of ancient performances as means to interpret anew the traditions of the Bible, to reconsider the disciplines we use to study the Bible so as to take account of orality, and to develop steps in a process of performance analysis of biblical texts. Biblical performance criticism is quite eclectic and takes a variety of forms. The purpose of this essay is to give an overview of performance criticism as a contrast to narrative criticism as it has been used to study narrative in print. The essay uses examples from the Gospel of Mark as a performance in an ancient context—the first and early second centuries.¹

Part 1 From Narrative Criticism to Performance Criticism: A Paradigm Shift

1 *Narrative Criticism*

Narrative criticism is a foundational discipline for performance criticism. In contrast to source and redaction criticism, which fragmented the Gospels in

1 With this essay, I am delighted to honor Alan Culpepper, an extraordinary person: a most careful scholar, a creative and innovative mind, an outstanding teacher, an insightful exegete, a prolific author, a pioneer in theological education, a deeply spiritual churchman, and a human being of profound integrity. Beginning with our student days at Duke, I have been privileged to know Alan as a close friend and a generative scholar whose work has had a lasting impact on me and so many others. This essay is a shortened version of an article originally translated and published in French as “Du récit imprimé au récit performé. Une introduction à la ‘critique de la performance,’” *Narrativité, oralité et performance: 7e Colloque international du réseau de recherche Narratologie et Bible (RRENAB)*, 5 au 7 juin 2014, Université de Montréal (*Terra Nova*, 4), ed. Alain Gignac (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 43–69; the full English version is to be published as “From Narrative in Print to Narrative in Performance” in *Oral History Journal of South Africa*, forthcoming. This shortened form is used here by permission of both publishers.

search of history, narrative criticism has appreciated the coherence of the final form of each Gospel as a whole—overall plot, characters, settings, consistent standards of judgment, and literary strategies by which each Gospel is composed, along with the story’s rhetorical impact.²

A key to narrative criticism is the concept of the *story world*. The point is not only that there is a coherent sequence of literary features and plot developments, but rather that together these narrative features create a story world that the reader enters into, experiences, and may be changed by. As such, rather than being simply a vehicle for teaching a message, a Gospel has value as a story in its own right capable of affecting the minds and hearts of its readers.

For contemporary readers to understand a story world of a Gospel, they must be familiar with the historical time period and location in which that Gospel was written. In other words, the story world of a Gospel can only be interpreted faithfully in the context of the society, culture, and historical circumstances of the first century. Familiarity with this background knowledge is different from reconstructing history from the text. Rather, it is making use of knowledge of the period to understand the story world.

Narrative criticism has been recognized as a major advance in biblical studies. The difficulty is that scholars have most often interpreted the Gospels with the media assumptions of contemporary print culture, suggested in this diagram:

single author >> fixed text >> silent reader alone and in private

In narrative criticism, a print medium mentality assumes that there was a single author who composed in the act of writing a manuscript for readers and that, in that task, the author had access to written traditions (such as writings considered to be Scripture) for quotation and allusion. We have used the term *inter-text-uality* to refer to these relationships. We have assumed an original written manuscript that was meant to be fixed so that it could be copied accurately and subsequently read silently in private or read aloud to a group. This “autograph” copy functioned like a first printing from a press, except that, in antiquity, the text was “corrupted” in the course of being copied by hand. Text critics work from numerous later extant copies to attempt to reconstruct the text of *the* original manuscript, which in turn serves as the basis for our narrative analysis.

2 On narrative criticism, see David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012); Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); and James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism and the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

Furthermore, scholars have frequently had a picture of the ancient world that involves other assumptions true of a print medium, namely, that education was available to much of the population, that most people could read at some level, and that manuscripts were inexpensive and widely accessible. In light of this common picture, biblical critics have tended to assume that the ancient experience of reading aloud to a group differed little from the modern experience of an individual reading or studying the text silently and in private. However, the more we have learned about ancient media, the more we have come to recognize that our modern print assumptions are anachronistic and problematic for ancient texts. The challenge, then, is to embrace a new paradigm of orality and performance.³

2 *Performance Criticism*

This challenge has led us to develop performance critical tools to analyze ancient texts and traditions with a fresh set of assumptions that reflect ancient media.⁴ The word performance is an encompassing term that refers to formal or informal presentations of traditions, given from memory or read aloud by lectors, presumably in lively ways. Performance covers many genres: storytelling, orations, epistles, wisdom sayings, apocalyptic traditions, among others. Because we are using the Gospel of Mark as a case study in this essay, the relevant genre of ancient performances will be that of storytelling.

Performance criticism seeks to reconstruct the dynamics of ancient societies as predominantly oral cultures and then to reconceive the New Testament (biblical) writings as witnesses to oral performances within those cultures. This re-conception is not depicting a divide between ancient writing and ancient performances. There were complex and dynamic interactions between ancient writings and oral performances. Rather, this re-conception reflects a fundamental shift from silent reading in print to vocal sound in oral performances. This shift involves not just vocal sound but embodied performance. Performances were embodied in a time and place by a performer with a participating audience. Performance criticism shifts the center of gravity from manuscripts in print to the ancient performance events to which those manuscripts bear witness.

3 David Rhoads and Joanna Dewey, "Performance Criticism: A Paradigm Shift in New Testament Studies," in *From Text to Performance: Narrative and Performance Criticisms in Dialogue and Debate*, BPCS 10, ed. Kelly R. Iverson (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 1–26.

4 For a more extensive introduction to performance criticism, see David Rhoads, "Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies—Part 1," *BTB* 36 (2006): 118–33, and "Part 2," in *BTB* 36 (2006): 164–83.

In regard to studying the gospel narratives, it is important to clarify that narrative criticism and performance criticism are not opposites. They both deal with narrative. As such, the move from narrative criticism to performance criticism is a shift from narrative as a modern experience in the silent, individual reading of print to narrative as an experience by the public audience of an ancient performance. In other words, the shift is not from narrative to performance but from narrative in print to narrative in performance. As such, the shift is a transition to a different medium.

As noted above, performance criticism envisions ancient societies as predominantly oral cultures. Scholars generally view ancient Mediterranean cultures as pre-industrial agrarian societies with strong urban centers. Two to three percent of the people were wealthy and powerful elites, with some merchants and retainers of the elites but no middle class; about ninety percent were peasants; and seven or eight percent on the boundaries of society due to illness, disability, or impurity. Studies in the last few decades have shown that, for the most part, literacy rates mirrored this class configuration, with literacy mostly limited to the elites and some of their retainers, often slaves.⁵ Many scholars now argue that the educational system was for elites only, not the general populace, and that, in families and in public, traditions were passed on mainly in memory by word of mouth. In contrast to elites, most early Palestinian Jewish communities had few or no manuscript scrolls. On average, it is likely that as few as five percent of the population overall could read or write at all, and even then with varying degrees of facility. Literacy rates and skills varied from place to place, particularly in urban (higher) and rural (lower) areas and between males (higher) and females (lower). *All*, including elites, were steeped in orality.

Given this picture of society, we can imagine that the earliest followers of Jesus in the first century, who came predominantly from the lower classes, were embedded in this traditional oral culture and that therefore they experienced the Gospels in oral storytelling. For first-century Christians, a Gospel was not experienced as writing on a scroll but as a story in performance. The Gospel was not so much a text as an event.

Performance criticism argues that the media model of the ancient world contrasts with the modern print model in four interrelated and interwoven dynamics: orality, memory, scribing and scrolls, and performance.⁶ (1) Orality:

5 William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989) and Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2001).

6 For a more fully developed discussion of the ancient media model, see the article referenced in footnote 1 above.

In predominantly oral cultures, most traditional knowledge and values were shared in face-to-face social communications. In this context, speech, even ordinary language, was formulated so as to be powerful and memorable. (2) Memory: In ancient Mediterranean societies, memory was more important than writing as the repository of tradition. It would not have been unusual for a storyteller to recount a Gospel from memory, a performance of which would have taken between two hours (Mark and John) and four hours (Matthew and Luke). (3) Scribing and Scrolls: Early Christian scribes were probably not professional scribes and they would have made changes, as performers did, by editing and adapting what they wrote to time and circumstance. It is reasonable to imagine that the Gospel of Mark, for example, was composed in mind and memory and most often performed from memory without the aid of a scroll.⁷ It was probably put in writing through dictation. (4) Performance: Performance criticism encourages us to think of the text of the Gospel of Mark as a document that was derived from and meant for performance, somewhat like a script for a play or a musical score. By acting out the story, the performer brings the story world of a Gospel to life in space and time and seeks to draw the communal audience into that world so as to have a particular impact on them. Performance events were related to the collective memory and the communal identity of the audience. Informal teaching and formal performances of community traditions were the primary means by which defined ethnic groups in a predominantly oral culture taught, reinforced, modified or even subverted their customs, values, history, and beliefs.

Based on this understanding of performance as a complex media event, performances might be described as follows:

composer/performer >> performances [by memory or lively reading] >> communal audience

Here the paradigm shift from narrative in print to narrative in performance, and thus from narrative criticism to performance criticism, is made plain. We prefer the term “composer” or “performer” to that of “author” because the compositions were created in and for oral performances. Evidence suggests that performers did not aim for rote memorization or verbatim repetition because, with each performance, the performer changed, the audiences changed, and the context changed. Performers adapted the material in order to have a

⁷ Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Case for Mark Composed in Performance*, BCPS 3 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), and Joanna Dewey, *The Oral Ethos of the Early Church: Speaking, Writing, and the Gospel of Mark*, BPCS 8 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013).

persuasive impact on the audience before them. Unlike contemporary audiences in which people who gather for a play or a film do not know each other, audiences of Gospel performances would likely have been a community of believers or people in a village or a section of a city. This communal experience would have been very different from the experience of an individual reading a printed Gospel alone and in silence. Based on this paradigm shift, how do performance critics understand the Gospel of Mark?

Part 2 From Narrative in Print to Narrative in Performance: Examples from the Gospel of Mark

Before discussing specific instances in which performance criticism of an oral Mark differs from narrative analysis of Mark in print, it will help to give an overview of performance critical studies of the Gospel of Mark.

1 *Performance Criticism of the Gospel of Mark: Overview*

There have been several full-scale performance critical studies of Mark. Richard Swanson was the first to explore Mark's performative potential in *Provoking the Gospel of Mark*.⁸ In *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark*, Whitney Shiner gave a thorough analysis from many ancient sources of the rhetorical dynamics that can shape our understanding of how the Gospel of Mark was performed: emotion, delivery, memorization, gesture and movement, and audience.⁹ In *The Case for Mark Composed in Performance*, Antoinette Wire argued that Mark was composed by a series of performers over several decades, each of whom made distinctive contributions to the developing story.¹⁰ Richard Horsley provided an overall analysis of Mark based how it might be heard by a Judean audience in interaction with the traditions of Israel, in *Hearing the Whole Story*.¹¹

In articles and book chapters, a number of studies have dealt with the interaction between the oral and written dynamics of Mark. Werner Kelber argued that the written medium of Mark differed sharply in its meaning and effect

8 Richard W. Swanson, *Provoking the Gospel of Mark: A Storyteller's Commentary, Year B* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2005).

9 Whitney Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003).

10 Wire, *The Case for Mark*; Richard A. Horsley, *Text and Tradition in Performance and Writing*, BPCS 9 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 220–45, 246–78.

11 Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

from the oral medium of Mark upon which the written Mark was based.¹² In subsequent articles, Kelber revised and refined his earlier thesis.¹³ Other authors, such as Richard Horsley, have challenged Kelber's early views and have argued for the oral dynamics of Mark in performance.¹⁴

Kelber has also worked with the oral dynamics of Mark in relation to the traditions of Israel with which an audience would be familiar. Horsley has drawn on the work of John Miles Foley to demonstrate the ways in which references or allusions to events in Israel's history would have conjured up the whole scenario of the event from which they came.¹⁵ Botha and Maxwell have also explored Mark's use of Judean traditions in an ethos of orality.¹⁶

A number of studies have dealt with the distinctly oral features of Mark's language. Joanna Dewey wrote several articles depicting the interweaving patterns that serve to structure Mark's story and dealing with the interpretive implications.¹⁷ James Maxey has shown the power dynamics of language in Mark as speech-acts.¹⁸ Lee and Scott proposed sound mapping as a way to explore the oral impact on a listening audience, with a treatment of the Markan crucifixion scene as one of their case studies.¹⁹

The idea that performance criticism developed from and effectively draws upon and transforms narrative criticism, as this current essay argues, is evident in many places. Consider Kelly Iverson's edited collection titled *From Text*

12 Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

13 See relevant essays in Werner H. Kelber, *Imprints, Voiceprints, and Footprints of Memory: Collected Essays of Werner H. Kelber* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013).

14 See for example, Richard A. Horsley, "The Gospel of Mark in the Interface of Orality and Writing," in *The Interface of Orality and Writing: Speaking, Seeing, Writing in the Shaping of New Genres*, ed. Annette Weissenrieder and Robert B. Coote (Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 144–65.

15 Horsley, *Text and Tradition*.

16 Pieter J. J. Botha, "Mark's Story as Oral Traditional Literature," in *Orality and Literacy in Early Christianity*, BPCS 5 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 163–90. Kathy Maxwell, "From Performance to Text to Performance: The New Testament's Use of the Hebrew Bible in a Rhetorical Culture," in *From Text to Performance*, 158–81.

17 Dewey, *Oral Ethos*, 53–127.

18 James Maxey, "The Power of Words in Mark: Their Potential and Their Limits," *CurrTheolMiss* 37 (2010) 296–303. On speech-act analysis of Mark, see also Bridget Gilfillan Upton, *Hearing Mark's Ending: Listening to Ancient Popular Texts through Speech Act Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

19 Margaret Ellen Lee and Bernard Brandon Scott, *Sound Mapping the New Testament* (Salem, OR: Polebridge Press, 2009), 199–224.

to *Performance: Narrative and Performance Criticisms in Dialogue and Debate*.²⁰ David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie revised their narrative analysis in *Mark as Story* to reflect a holistic approach to Mark in performance.²¹ Philip Ruge-Jones has shown the distinct nature of the role of the narrator in performance criticism in distinction from narrative criticism.²² Holly Hearon and Kelly Iverson have each explored characterization in the performance of Mark.²³ Kelly Iverson also analyzed the dynamics of the messianic secret in the performance of Mark²⁴ and the way in which humor works with a gathered audience in contrast to the experience of someone reading silently and alone.²⁵

Several studies have focused on the ancient audiences of Mark. Ruge-Jones has sought to see what we can learn by distinguishing actual audiences from the audiences of Jesus depicted in the story world.²⁶ Tom Boomershine has argued that our understanding of the rhetoric of Mark changes when we consider how the performer's characterizations may have had all the figures in the story address the audience directly as the object of their dialogue.²⁷ As a basis for interpreting Mark, David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie developed an imagined performance scenario of an audience in a village in Palestine experiencing the Gospel of Mark just after the Roman-Judean War of 66 to 70 CE.²⁸

20 Iverson, ed., *From Text to Performance*.

21 Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*.

22 Philip Ruge-Jones, "Omnipresent, not Omniscient: How Literary Interpretation Confuses the Storyteller's Narrating," in Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, ed., *Between Author and Audience in Mark: Narration, Characterization, Interpretation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 29–43.

23 Holly E. Hearon, "From Narrative to Performance: Methodological Considerations and Interpretive Moves," in *From Text to Performance*, 211–32, and Kelly Iverson, "A Centurion's 'Confession': A Performance-Critical Analysis of Mark 15:39," *JBL* (2011): 329–50.

24 Kelly Iverson, "'Wherever the Gospel is Preached': The Paradox of Secrecy in the Gospel of Mark," in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, SBLRBS 65, ed. Kelly Iverson and Christopher Skinner (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 181–210.

25 Kelly Iverson, "Incongruity, Humor, and Mark: Performance and the Use of Laughter in the Second Gospel (Mark 8:14–21)," *NTS* 59 (2013): 2–19.

26 Philip Ruge-Jones, "Those Sitting Around Jesus: Situating the Storyteller within Mark's Gospel," in *From Text to Performance*, 27–52.

27 Thomas E. Boomershine, "Audience Address and Purpose in the Performance of Mark," in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, 115–44. Thomas E. Boomershine, "Audience Asides and the Audiences of Mark: The Difference Performance Makes," in *From Text to Performance*, 80–96.

28 David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, "Reflections," in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, 261–82; David Rhoads, "Performance Events in Early Christianity:

Most recently, Thomas Boomersshine, in *The Messiah of Peace*, has produced a full-scale performance commentary on the passion-resurrection narrative in Mark, dealing with sound patterns, characters, traditions, audience, performance characteristics, and much more.²⁹ Given the number of sessions and papers at academic societies that deal with performance criticism, along with a website devoted to it and the Biblical Performance Criticism series at Wipf and Stock Press, there is little doubt that a steady stream of books and essays will continue to take the discipline forward in relation to Mark's Gospel.

2 *Examples from the Gospel of Mark*

What follows are reflections on some dynamics of the Gospel of Mark in performance as distinguished from an analysis of the study of Mark as a printed text to be read in silence and in private. As a literary work, the Gospel of Mark is a narrative in print. As a performance, Mark is a story in motion. It is an event. The distinct genre is storytelling.

(a) The performance brings the story to life in the here and now. The performer is not just reciting the story. The performer is a storyteller who, in a variety of ways, is also *at the same time* acting out the story in the course of telling it. That is to say, in storytelling, the past time and space of the story world are collapsed into the present time and space of the "stage" as the storyteller is acting it out.³⁰ This collapse, this telescoping of the events in the story world with the actions before a live audience, explains how a performance gives the story a sense of immediacy, a sense for the audience that the "there and then" becomes "here and now."

This immediacy includes settings, plot events, and characters. As such, there is a correlation between the *settings* in the story world and locations in the performance space. For example, when the performer says that Jesus went to Capernaum in the story world, this is a stage direction for the performer to make some movement in the performance space. The same correlation is true for *events* in the unfolding plot of the story. When the story describes an action in the story world, such as Jesus laying his hands on someone for healing or Judas kissing Jesus, this evokes at the same time a gesture from the performer to help the audience imagine it. Also, the performer brings each *character* to

New Testament Writings in an Oral Context," in *Interface of Orality and Writing*, 166–93.

29 Thomas E. Boomersshine, *The Messiah of Peace: A Performance-Criticism Commentary on Mark's Passion-Resurrection Narrative*, BPCS 11 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015).

30 Kelly R. Iverson, "The Present Tense of Performance: Immediacy and Transformative Power in Luke's Passion," in *From Text to Performance*, 131–57.

life by portraying the dialogue and actions as if the performer *were* the character in that moment when the character in the story world is speaking or acting. So, when the performer tells us that in the story world a suppliant pleads with Jesus or that a demon screams, then this is also a direction for the performer to say the suppliant's line as a plea and to express the demon's voice loudly. Characters become "real people" in the performance space; they are not mere functions of a plot.³¹

(b) The performer draws the audience into the story world.³² In storytelling, the performer includes the audience in the performance space. This is different from a theatrical play. In theater, there is an imaginary "fourth wall" in the front of the stage area that separates the action on stage from the audience. The audience observes and is not part of the play. By contrast, in storytelling, the performer addresses the audience directly as if there were no fourth wall, so that the audience is encompassed in the performance space. The performer can raise the fourth wall when doing characterizations, by projecting one character talking to another imagined character "on stage." Or the performer can breach this imaginary fourth wall selectively even when enacting a character on stage. For example, when the performer takes the role of the character John the Baptist, "John" can address the audience directly as though the audience members were the crowds who had come for baptism (Mark 1:7–8). Or consider the end of Jesus' eschatological discourse, where Jesus says, "And what I say to you [the four disciples] I say to all: Keep awake" (Mark 13:37). Here, the performer as "Jesus" may turn from addressing the imagined disciples on stage to address the audience directly.

In these ways, in addition to being encompassed in the story space, the audience becomes part of the *story world* by playing the role of the imagined characters who are addressed by one "character" or another.³³ The performer may even move among the audience addressing this or that person as a suppliant or this or that group in the audience as disciples or Pharisees. This dynamic relationship between performer and audience changes the ways we think about the rhetorical impact of the Gospel because it leads us to see an impact that engages the audience by addressing them both as supporters and opponents of Jesus.

31 Holly E. Hearon, "Characters in Text and Performance: The Gospel of John," in *From Text to Performance*, 53–79.

32 Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel*, 143–52, 171–90.

33 Boomershine, "Audience Asides and the Audiences of Mark."

(c) Storytelling techniques. The techniques for telling and acting out the story make the story lively and realistic. The performance arts of antiquity (and modernity) all serve this purpose. Many of these arts relate to the use of the voice: *inflection*, which is relevant to how every line is delivered; *volume*, as when Jesus gives a loud cry from the cross (15:37); *pace of performing*, such as saying slowly the first and last words of the Gospel (1:1; 16:8) or Jesus' agonizing prayer at Gethsemane (14:36); *pitch*, as when Jairus pleads with Jesus in a high voice to heal his dying daughter (5:23); and *voice characterizations* to distinguish the different figures in the story. Other performance arts involve the body: *gestures*, as when Jesus puts his fingers in a deaf man's ears (7:31); and *posture*, as when Jesus looks up to heaven when praying over the bread (6:41). *Facial expressions* figure prominently in ancient and modern performance arts: for example, scowls made by opponents of Jesus when accusing him; a look of puzzlement expressed by the disciples; or eye messages, as when the storyteller displays the crowds being agog in amazement over Jesus' healings. Drawing mainly from rhetorical handbooks and other ancient literature, as well as artistic representations in antiquity, we know some things about what these arts were and how they may have been expressed in antiquity.³⁴

(d) The role of the narrator. In print, the narrator is effaced (as a third person omniscient narrator) so that the reader focuses on the story with little awareness of the role the narrator is playing. By contrast, in performance, the narrator is embodied. As such, the narrator is never effaced, but is always present as the performer telling the story. The performer assumes the role of the narrator, as though witnessing the events being depicted.³⁵

Although many of the traits of the narrator that give authority to the narrator when the story is being read silently in print are also present in performance, the effects are different. For example, the omniscience of a literary narrator becomes qualified as the extensive but limited knowledge of a human narrating.³⁶ Furthermore, in performance, the authority of the narrator is influenced by the audience's personal knowledge of the performer: for example, his or her social location and the integrity of the performer in the eyes of the audience. Is the performer a follower of Jesus who embodies the values and dynamics of the story? The authority of the performer is also established by

34 On ancient gestures, see Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel*, 127–42, and, for example, Gregory S. Aldrete, *Gestures and Acclamations in Ancient Rome* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 1999).

35 Ruge-Jones, "Omnipresent, not Omniscient."

36 Ruge-Jones, "Omnipresent, not Omniscient."

the quality of the performance; if the performer performs poorly, it will clearly diminish the effect of the Gospel story.³⁷

3 *Performance as Interpretation*

We are used to thinking of interpretation as commentary on a written text. However, in acting out the Gospel, each performance *is* an interpretation. With print, an individual reader uses his or her imagination to picture the story and then comments on its meaning for others. By contrast, the performer as narrator guides the imagination of the audience directly in verbal and visual ways to convey meaning and to create an impact.

As such, performance both limits and expands interpretation. On the one hand, performance limits interpretations because, in a performance, the performer has to make interpretive choices about how to deliver every line and act out every scene. By presenting one way of understanding the story, these choices exclude other interpretive choices. For example, the choice to portray the disciples as ultimate failures in following Jesus precludes their portrayal as ultimately faithful. On the other hand, multiple performances expand interpretations because the narrative can be performed in many different ways. Mainly, however, performance expands and amplifies interpretation because it is in a different medium.

(a) The performer employs interpretive techniques in telling the story. The performer infers from the story itself what choices to make in performance. For example, we have learned from narrative criticism a rich plethora of ways in which the narrator of the Gospel of Mark uses what we have called “literary” devices to engage the reader: repetition, verbal threads, series of three, riddles, questions, type scenes with variation, irony, summaries. In performance, these features are still very much in play; and a performer can shape and magnify the effect of them in sound. For example, the storyteller can help to clarify the allegorical meaning of the parables by enunciating each item of the allegory. Or the storyteller can go to the same place on the stage space to show a connection between three events in a series, such as the three passion predictions. Or questions can be posed by the storyteller in different ways to reflect questions that are accusatory, that reveal ignorance, that imply chiding, or that are rhetorical questions expecting no answer. Raising the eyebrows can suggest irony in Jesus’ correction of his disciples. The emphatic repetition of the same instructions to the disciples in the sequential feeding stories can elicit humor and reinforce the denseness of the disciples.

37 Rhoads, “Performance Events in Early Christianity,” and Ruge-Jones, “Those Sitting Around Jesus,” 38.

Furthermore, thanks to the development of “sound mapping,” we can see where the performer was meant to make pauses and transitions. The units of meaning are ordered to provide breaks for breathing and pauses for transitions. These patterns of sound in performance also offer clues to the listening audience about how to follow the narrative line.³⁸ For example, Lee and Scott show that the parameters of the crucifixion scene can be determined by coherent and distinctive sound structures (15:24–41), which alert the performer where to pause before moving on to the empty tomb scene and guide the audience to bring closure to one scene before entering into the next.³⁹ Furthermore, from sound mapping, we can see how the sound effects of certain words and phrases can mimic the action being described. For example, the taunting of Jesus from by-standers at the cross is punctuated by hissing and spitting sounds in the language (15:29–32).⁴⁰ The performer can make such action-sounds emphatic and powerful. Also, the performer can emphasize the euphony of certain sayings as a means to fix the words in memory, such as the chiasmic structure involved in sayings such as “For those who want to save their life will lose it, but those who lose their life ... will save it” (8:35). These various patterns of sound provide new ways to grasp meaning and rhetoric alike.

(b) Delivery as a technique to convey meaning. *How* a line is delivered contributes to the meaning of that line. A silent reader of literature does not self-consciously have to make a decision about delivery, but a performer does. For example, if Jesus tells the disciples, “Don’t you understand yet?” (8:21), the performer *must* choose to deliver that line so as to express whether Jesus is pleading, impatient, angry, disparaging, sarcastic, disappointed, or frustrated. The choice will affect the understanding of the whole Gospel of Mark, including the characterization of Jesus and whether the disciples in the story world are discredited or not. In addition to voice, the performer’s entire body conveys the delivery. Gestures, facial expressions, eye movement, body position are not add-ons; they are an integral part of the dynamics that determine meaning and impact in performance.

The performer looks for clues in the story to infer what range of choices may be available to express meaning and rhetorical impact by delivery. Because every line of an entire Gospel is expressed aloud and embodied, the performer must choose what the distinctive delivery will be for each and every line.

38 Lee and Scott, *Sound Mapping*. For more on sound mapping, see D. Nässelqvist, “Public Reading and Aural Intensity: An Analysis of the Soundscape in John 1–4” (Doctoral Dissertation, Lund University, 2014).

39 Lee and Scott, *Sound Mapping*, 199–224.

40 Lee and Scott, *Sound Mapping*, 206.

Imagining how a line can be delivered in different ways is a critical means to take into account the diversity of meanings and the potential impacts that different performers may have expressed in performance.

(c) Emotions as integral to meaning and impact. Expressing emotions is a critical way in which a performer expressed meaning and rhetoric. Ancient rhetoricians believed that stirring emotions was the most powerful way to transform an audience—through shock, anger, amazement, fear, hope, laughter, and more. Just as every spoken line is delivered with voice and body, so also every line has an emotional affect at some level, be it a strong expression or a subtle range of tones. For example, the dominant motif of fear in Mark can be shown by the performer with voice and body across the range of characters, including the disciples, the different authority figures, as well as Jesus at Gethsemane, and culminating in the women running away from the tomb in terror. The emotions of the story are crucial to conveying an interpretation of the story—what they are, how they are expressed, how they persuade, and how they invite commitment.

How do emotions work? In performance, we do not just read *about* the demons' fear of Jesus, we *experience* their terror acted out before us. Or, in regard to the mockery of Jesus at the cross in Mark, Whitney Shiner remarks that, "When I read the mockery silently, I usually think of the cleverness of Mark's irony. When I perform it, I think about how nasty the mockery is."⁴¹ Even a storyteller's stunned silence after the recounting of Jesus' death can convey emotions of shock and sorrow.

(d) Emotional catharsis. A narrative critic can chart the emotions named in and implied by a Gospel story. But what is significant here is not just a matter of identifying a series of disparate emotions, but discerning the accumulative impact of a sequence of similar or different emotions. Some literary critics divide the Gospel into two halves, the first half dealing with miracles and the second half with suffering, that are unrelated or that contradict each other. By contrast in performance, the second half builds on the first, for it is only after an audience has the repeated experience of the emotion of amazement at Jesus doing one astounding work of power after another in the first half of Mark that the audience is prepared to accept and be emotionally impacted by the tragic events of suffering in the second half of Mark.⁴² Another example involves the crucifixion scene: after experiencing vicariously Jesus' agitation in Gethsemane, his subsequent abandonment and humiliation, and his poignant cry of lament in the crucifixion, the audience will be better prepared to go

⁴¹ Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel*, 182.

⁴² Dewey, *Oral Ethos*, 123–24.

through such an experience for themselves. A series of emotions can create a catharsis, especially if a community experiences the performance together and especially given the immediacy of the performed events in the here and now. An emotional catharsis evoked by performance was likely a profound means to engender transformation, commitment, and action in shaping new Christian communities.

4 *Mark's Communal Audiences*

Mark may have been composed to address different audiences. After all, the whole point was for the disciples to spread the gospel to all the Gentile nations. At one time or another, the audience may have been a small group in a house church, after a meal, in a synagogue, or at an urban tenement. Or it may have been a larger group of disparate people in the town center, a public hall, or an open area in or between villages. Likely there would have been a mix of people. For example, in a village square in Palestine, there may have been Judeans, Gentiles, males, females, peasants, craftsmen, expendables, some authority figures, the sick and disabled, people considered unclean, and so on. This variability invites multiple faithful interpretations based on different scenarios of performer, audience, and context.⁴³ For example, a performance to peasant men and women with various ailments would have emphasized compassion and hope through identification of the audience with the peasant figures in the story who come to Jesus with ailments. If authorities were present, especially near the time of the Roman-Judean War, a performance might have put into stark relief the issues at stake in Jesus' conflict with Judean and Roman leaders. A performer may have been oppositional or deferential toward authorities present at the performance.

(a) Audience participation. We know from ancient sources that audiences contributed actively to performances. A silent reader is mainly receptive. The silent reader negotiates meaning but does not change the words on a page. The responses of an actual audience can affect the words of the performer or the way lines are delivered. A performer might have shortened or lengthened what was performed depending on the interest of an audience. We cannot speak about performances, therefore, without talking about the involvement of audiences.

Communal audiences react differently than individual readers.⁴⁴ Shiner points out that communal responses can be infectious. People laugh out loud together. They may applaud or cheer. They may vocally express joy over

43 Rhoads, "Performance Events in Early Christianity."

44 Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel*, 143–52.

a healing or amazement at a miracle. Ancient positive responses might have included cheering, clapping, foot stomping, standing, laughter, or weeping. Negative responses might have included shouts of disapproval, covering the ears, or even walking out. Individuals may have been emboldened by the group responses to speak out an individual response. Humor was designed to elicit laughter. For example, the denseness of the disciples in Mark is a set-up for humor. Iverson shows how the disciples' dialogue in the third boat scene elicits audience laughter by contrasting the disciples' previous experience of feeding crowds twice before with very little bread (and even now having a loaf with them) over against their words, "We have no bread" (8:14–16). And Jesus replies, "Don't you understand yet?" (8:21).⁴⁵ Overall, unless silence was particularly appropriate to a certain scene, it was considered an insult not to give overt verbal and physical reactions to a performance.

One way to study audience participation is to identify those places in the storytelling that seem to call for a response by an audience. Shiner refers to "applause lines" as triggers for audience response.⁴⁶ I prefer "response lines" since the responses included many more reactions than simply applause. The performer will play to these cues for audience response, much as a stand-up comedian will set up the audience for a line designed to bring laughter. Or much as a U.S. President in a State of the Union address will deliver lines designed to elicit cheering, clapping, and standing to show support for what has been said. We need to pay attention to response lines as a basis for interpretation. And we need to develop criteria to identify possible triggers in a script for response, such as language that is rhythmic or grating; climaxes in the narrative, such as when Jesus verbally defeats opponents; places where the crowds in the story respond with expressions of amazement over a healing; or moments of extreme pathos, as when Jesus agonizes at Gethsemane. The experience of performing to an actual audience in a modern language is also a means to identify where some response triggers are to be found. Through the embodiment of a saying or by means of pauses or when building to a climax, the performer can elicit audience responses at these trigger points. Of course, ancient audiences may also have intruded with questions or raised objections. Performers would no doubt know how to handle hecklers. Mark's Gospel may have been composed to anticipate audience resistance to the story through the articulations of misunderstandings by the disciples and through the objections of the Pharisees.

(b) Audience in historical and cultural context. Audiences experienced a performance in their own historical context and in light of their own

45 Kelly R. Iverson, "Incongruity, Humor, and Mark."

46 Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel*, 153–70.

communal traditions. Hence, they did not experience it in a vacuum. They had local cultural mores, religious traditions, and specific historical circumstances. We need to imagine how the performer drew on the traditions of Israel and the traditions about Jesus to create an “echo chamber” wherein the story could speak to the audience’s particular context—affirming the customs and traditions they already knew or challenging them.⁴⁷ References in the Gospel to historical figures, traditional place names, stories that were analogues for events in Israel’s past, as well as quotations, allusions, and sayings—all of these conjured up associations with Israel’s history. In performance to an audience who knew these traditions aurally, these details served as metonymic references (a partial reference invokes memory of the whole) that led hearers to recall entire events with which they were familiar from the experiences of hearing stories from scripture and tradition. Richard Horsley gives the example of how the sea crossings in Mark would evoke the memory of the exodus event as a whole.⁴⁸ In addition, the story proffered associations with the circumstances of the audience’s immediate historical context, as, for example, Jesus’ references to persecution, the entrance to Jerusalem, the predictions about the destruction of the Temple, and the crucifixion by the Roman soldiers—all served as indirect commentary on the Roman-Judean War. We can also imagine how the story may have played out in the communal audience *after* a performance of the Gospel, including conversation with the performer, as the community sought to deal with the impact and implications of the performance on their community. All these efforts at constructing a performance scenario make the imagination so much more concrete as a basis for interpreting the story.

(c) Rhetorical impacts on audiences. Performance shifts the center of gravity from a focus on meaning to a focus on rhetorical impact. Rhetorical analysis seeks to articulate the overall purpose and effect that the Gospel of Mark may have had on a particular ancient community.

A performer is acutely aware that the story is an act of communication. The performer is speaking the words directly to an audience in order to have an impact on them. Furthermore, in performance, the focus is on how the story shapes or transforms not just an individual but a *community*. In reader response criticism, we have looked for responses of individual readers. Now we need to imagine how these Gospels in performance may have generated communal impacts and evoked communal responses in actual audiences.

47 John Miles Foley, *The Singer of Tales in Performance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

48 Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*, 64.

The whole point of rhetoric is to persuade. But rhetorical impact is so much more than simply being persuaded to accept a particular point of view. It involves transformation through insight, emotion, new perceptions, changing relationships, subverting core values and instilling others, creating community, fostering commitments, provoking action, or engendering courage in the face of persecution. What are the potential goals of the performance of this Gospel in particular and how does the performer accomplish them? The performer decides consciously (or perhaps unconsciously) what he or she determines ought to be the overall impact of the Gospel and then performs each line and episode so as to lead the audience toward that experience.

Conclusion: Prospectus for Performance Criticism

Unlike other biblical disciplines, performance criticism takes seriously the predominantly oral nature of the cultural ethos of early Christianity. In so doing, it seeks to reimagine our extant texts as witnesses to performance events and thereby to rethink the experience of the Gospel and other New Testament compositions by the first Christians. To make such a transition requires reconceiving traditional disciplines and introducing new ones. The resulting benefits in our understanding of the meaning and rhetorical impacts of texts such as the Gospel of Mark are multiplying rapidly.

Performance criticism is still in its infancy as a discipline. While promising beginnings have been made, the full implications have yet to unfold. We are learning everything we can about the dynamics and ethos of oral cultures in general and of the oral/aural Mediterranean cultures of the first century in particular, including the variety of ways in which orality was interfacing and interrelating with writing. We are exploring ancient genres in orality and seeking to discern the dynamics of performances by memory and performances by lectors. We are constructing possible performance scenarios that give us concrete imaginative contexts for performances of the documents we have. We are doing contemporary performances in Greek and in translation as means to get in touch with the dynamics and sounds of performance.

Performance criticism is an exciting adventure in the field of biblical studies. It is important that we recognize it as a paradigm shift so that we embrace its revolutionary nature and grasp the changes it requires of us. Everything is different because it is all immersed in a new medium. As such, performance criticism calls forth from us fresh methods, new information, and a great stretch of the imagination.

Do You not Yet Trust God's Rule Breaking in on Earth? The Disciples in Mark

Joanna Dewey

The Gospel of Mark has long been considered a passion narrative with an extended introduction, with the central watershed event the crucifixion. Alan Culpepper's narrative commentary on Mark falls in this interpretive tradition: "Mark placed priority neither on Jesus' words nor on his works but on his death and resurrection.... It is only in the context of his death that his identity can be understood."¹ With the rise of redaction and especially narrative criticism in the 1970s and '80s, much attention has been paid to Mark's portrait of the disciples, with scholars fairly evenly divided between those who argue that the Markan narrative calls for the total rejection of the disciples who flee at Jesus' arrest, and those who hold a more sympathetic view of the disciples, expecting their restoration in Galilee, a debate still not settled today.² There was general agreement, however, that, in Helmut Koester's words, Mark is an "instruction in discipleship."³ Then Richard Horsley argued that the central issue of the Gospel was not discipleship: "We have almost certainly been missing the full story, mistaking a subplot for the main plot of the Gospel."⁴ Rather he considered political and economic issues central, the relation of the empire of God to the empire of Rome. In response to Horsley, Werner Kelber argued, that, no, the cosmic dimension, the in-breaking of God's rule on earth, the struggle with evil or Satan, is what is central to the narrative.⁵

We have come to realize that all three themes, discipleship, politics, and cosmic transformation are major plot lines interwoven in the gospel, each

1 R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark*, HSBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2007), 19.

2 While I am of the restoration camp, for the purposes of this article it does not matter. I am concerned with why they fail within the narrative.

3 Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*. Vol. 2 of *History and Literature of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 171.

4 Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), xiii.

5 Werner H. Kelber, "Roman Imperialism and Early Christian Scribality" in *Orality, Literacy, and Colonialism in Antiquity*, ed. Jonathan A. Draper, SBLSS 47 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 135–53.

foregrounded at different points in the narrative.⁶ Scholars are currently paying greater attention to the cosmic dimension.⁷ Some are placing greater emphasis on Jesus as divine, while others are stressing the in-breaking of God's rule. On the one hand, there is what J. R. Daniel Kirk has described as "the rushing tide of conversation about divine Christology."⁸ One high Christology advocate, Rikki Watts, coined the term, "Yahweh Christology," for how he sees Jesus acting as God in Mark's narrative.⁹ Other scholars, such as Kirk and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, have started to pay more attention to the rule of God, seeing Jesus rather as God's agent. They see Jesus pointing away from himself towards God and the in-breaking of God's reign.¹⁰ These scholars differ in their interpretations of the forgiveness of sins and the sea and feeding episodes, in which Jesus acts in ways only God acts in the Hebrew scriptures. Are these actions to be understood as Jesus and Jesus alone acting as God acts, or are they to be understood as part of the in-breaking of God's rule on earth, and thus doable by anyone fully trusting the presence of God's rule on earth now? I have argued elsewhere that the Markan Jesus seems to expect the disciples to be able to do these things as well.¹¹ Here, in this article, I want to focus more generally on viewing discipleship and the disciples in relation to the in-breaking rule of God. If one sees the cosmic dimension, the in-breaking of God's rule, as the watershed event in Mark, how does that impact our understanding of the disciples and discipleship?

6 A clear analysis may be found in Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Mark's Jesus: Characterization as Narrative Christology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 21–55. Culpepper deals with all three themes but not as plot lines.

7 Attention to the cosmic dimension was raised earlier by Werner H. Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) and John R. Donahue, "A Neglected Factor in the Theology of Mark," *JBL* 101 (1982): 563–94.

8 J. R. Daniel Kirk, *A Man Attested by God: The Human Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2016), 581. Kirk describes a number of the recent proposals for early high Christology (16–37).

9 Rikki E. Watts, "In the Power and Authority of God: A Preliminary Exploration of Yahweh Christology in Mark," presented at the Mark Seminar, SBL Annual Meeting, 2009.

10 In his book, *Jesus, Disciple of the Kingdom: Mark's Christology for a Community in Crisis*, Osvaldo D. Vena goes so far as to understand Jesus himself in relation to the kingdom of God as a disciple (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014).

11 "The Markan Jesus, Jesus' Actions, and the Kingdom of God," in *Let the Reader Understand: Studies in Honor of Elizabeth Struthers Malbon*, ed. Edwin K. Broadhead (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018), 69–83.

In the latest edition (2012) of *Mark as Story*, David Rhoads, Donald Michie, and I have moved away from understanding the gospel as a passion narrative with an extended introduction. We write:

The cosmic conflict between God and Satan is foundational to all the other conflicts in the narrative.... The cosmic conflict—and God’s assured victory in the near future—are not “background....” As a result of our emphasis on the cosmic conflict, we shift the interpretive center of gravity from the end of the story to the beginning of the story.... [W]e focus on the cosmic shift that occurs at the opening of the story with the arrival of the rule of God. This arrival of God’s rule—the heavens opening, the defeat of Satan in the desert, and the announcement by Jesus—is the key watershed event in the narrative world. Mark, then, may be described as “the arrival of the rule of God with an extended denouement”—that is, all events in the story are manifestations and consequences of God’s activity in establishing God’s reign.¹²

In our view, Jesus is God’s agent proclaiming and enacting the rule of God on earth and inviting others to share in the rule of God.

Culpepper also stresses the importance of the in-breaking of God’s rule. He writes, “Nothing else compares to the announcement that God’s eschatological sovereignty has torn the heavens, crossed the boundaries, and been proclaimed by God’s Son.”¹³ But for Culpepper the breaking in of God’s rule occurs primarily after the crucifixion, after the centurion recognizes Jesus as the Son of God. It is then that the followers of Jesus will continue the work of God’s rule that Jesus had begun. The real work of followers to bring about God’s rule occurs only in the future, after the narrative of Mark concludes. I would argue, on the contrary, that the disciples are challenged to spread God’s rule as soon as they are called to be fishers of people. Of course, the crucifixion remains important—it is part of the cost of participating in God’s rule as long as this age continues. I would suggest, however, that it does not constitute a new beginning.

If, as we argue, the arrival of God’s rule on earth is the watershed event, then the central issue of discipleship becomes not “do the disciples recognize that Jesus is the Son of God?” or “do the disciples accept the inevitability of persecution or suffering?” but rather “do the disciples trust and enact the power of

12 *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), xiii.

13 Culpepper, *Mark*, 23.

God available to participants in God's rule now that it has arrived on earth?" The disciples do recognize who Jesus is: Peter recognizes Jesus as the Christ at Mark 8:29. While at first rejecting persecution for Jesus and themselves, they come to accept it. Yet they fail. Judas betrays Jesus, the twelve flee at Jesus' arrest, and Peter denies him three times before the cock crows twice. And the women, whom we are finally told have been following Jesus all along, witness the crucifixion, the burial, and the empty tomb (15:40–41). Yet they too fail; they run away in fear, saying nothing to anyone. So the question remains: Why did they all fail? What did they not understand or why were they unable to continue following?

In this article, I approach the question as a narrative critic. I am viewing the Gospel as a whole, without concern for what may be redaction or tradition. However, I understand the Gospel as an oral/aural narrative, one that was repeatedly told or performed to groups, not one that was read individually.¹⁴ Recognition that Mark was heard, performed, not read, affects my interpretation in three ways. First, in aural narrative, teaching is embedded in story and was often done by negative examples, "warning examples of how not to behave."¹⁵ So I suggest that first- and early second-century audiences would likely understand the disciples as rhetorical examples, exhorting them to do better, not as indications to reject the disciples. Second, by modern print standards, the narrative is exceedingly repetitious; repetition with variation is the typical way oral narrative develops a theme or stresses something as significant.¹⁶ Third, oral/aural narrative tends to be episodic, making little or no attempt at climactic linear development. Oral narrative is generally additive and aggregative;¹⁷ the way of thinking is an inclusive both/and rather than a logical either/or approach. Therefore, the fact that most healings occur in the first half of the narrative while instructions on persecution and service are in the second half does not indicate that the one supplants the other, but

14 Even though it probably existed in writing. On Mark as oral narrative, see Joanna Dewey, *The Oral Ethos of the Early Church: Speaking, Writing, and the Gospel of Mark*, Biblical Performance Criticism 8 (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013). In this article, I refer to the hearer or the audience. By this I always mean the implied hearer or audience within the text. Actual audiences would be greatly influenced by what they knew about Jesus or the disciples, but we have no access to that information.

15 Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1963), 48.

16 Eric A. Havelock, "Oral Composition in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles," *New Literary History* 16 (1984): 175–97.

17 Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, New Accents (London: Methuen, 1982), 141–43.

rather that both healing and persecution are part of the rule of God on earth in this age.

The Markan Jesus begins by announcing the arrival of God's rule: "The time is up: the empire of God is arriving! Change your ways, and put your trust in the good news" (1:15 sv¹⁸). The verb, "to approach or come near," is in the perfect tense, which in Greek carries the sense of "has occurred and is still true," that is, God's rule has come near and is here. Jesus' first act is to begin gathering the new community: he calls Simon and Andrew and James and John to become fishers of people, to take an active role gathering others into God's empire (1:16–20). Others are called as well: Levi (2:13–14) and a general invitation to the crowd (8:34).

The initial response of those called to trust the good news of the empire's arrival and to change their ways is very positive. The disciples are called to leave everything and follow Jesus, and they do so (1:16–20; 2:14); they are called to be with Jesus and to go out, proclaim and heal, and they do so (3:13–19; 6:7–13). Yet there are increasing indications that, although the disciples are enthusiastically embracing God's rule, they have difficulty comprehending all that it entails. They do not understand the parable of the sower and the seed (4:10, 13) or the teaching on clean and unclean (7:17–18); they fear Jesus' power over the sea and wind (4:35–41; 6:45–52), and they do not grasp that God provides food in the desert (6:30–44; 8:1–10; 14–21). As the narrative proceeds, they have trouble understanding the inevitability of persecution and their call to serve those with less status than themselves.

I shall look at the disciples' ability to trust in God's in-breaking reign and act appropriately as agents spreading God's empire in three areas: (1) healing and exorcism, (2) nature miracles, and (3) the new community and persecution from the powers-that-be, and I will close with some comments on the women disciples at the crucifixion and empty tomb. All three areas are related to God's power available to humans now that the rule of God has arrived on earth (1:14–15); however, the disciples' relationship to each differs.

Healings and Exorcisms

Jesus is presented healing and exorcising over and over again in Mark, especially in the first half of the narrative that takes place in Galilee, the place of

18 I am using the Scholars' Version translation throughout because it better reflects the colloquial nature of the Gospel's Greek and because it translates *pistis* as "trust" not "faith," which I think more accurately reflects the Markan sense. sv uses "empire" instead of "kingdom" to translate *basilea*, stressing that God's rule is an alternative to Caesar's rule.

God's in-breaking rule. Using the typical oral/aural device of repetition, the narrative stresses the reality of God's power to heal. Immediately after Jesus' announcement of the arrival of the rule of God and the calling of the first disciples, Jesus casts a demon out of a man in the synagogue, heals Peter's mother-in-law, heals all in the village who come to him for it, cleanses a leper, heals a paralyzed man and a man with a withered arm—all in Mark 1:21–3:6. As the narrative continues, he casts the legion of demons out of the Gerasene, cures a woman of internal bleeding, and raises a girl from the dead. Jesus heals many who come to him at Gennesaret, exorcises a Gentile woman's daughter, heals a deaf and mute man, a blind man at Bethsaida, the boy with an unclean spirit, and finally blind Bartimaeus. Jesus consistently points away from himself to God as the source of the healing.¹⁹ The sheer quantity and repetition of both healings and exorcisms conveys to the hearer that God's power is available now over Satan's minions, the demons, and over human illness due to impurity (e.g., the leper) and that due to sin (the paralytic). The rule of God is indeed present in the healings.

The disciples are present for virtually all the healings and are explicitly involved in some of them. They tell Jesus that Simon's mother-in-law is sick (1:29–31); they wonder how Jesus can ask who touched him in the midst of the crowd in the story of the woman with the flow of blood (5:25–33); and Peter, James, and John accompany Jesus for the raising of Jairus' daughter (5:21–24, 34–43). In four instances, the disciples' presence is indicated by a plural verb (1:21–28; 5:1–20; 6:53–56 [a mass healing]; 8:22–26). In five instances, the story contains no indication of the presence of the disciples; however, their presence in preceding and following passages suggests their continuing witness. The disciples are fulfilling their mission of being with Jesus.

The disciples are also explicitly called to share in God's healing power and they successfully do so. The narrator recounts that Jesus "formed a group of twelve to be his companions, and to be sent out to preach, and to have authority to drive out demons" (3:14–15). And Jesus "summoned the Twelve and started sending them out in pairs and giving them authority over unclean spirits.... So they set out and announced that people should turn their lives around, and they were driving out demons and anointing many sick people with oil and healing them" (6:7, 12–13). Although the explicit commission to the Markan disciples only covers exorcism, the report of the disciples' successful activities includes healing and proclaiming as well. In the narrative, the disciples easily accept Jesus' healings, their own access to God's power to heal, and their mission to do so. In the narrative, Jesus' healings cause controversy with his opponents—in the healing of the paralytic, the man with the withered hand,

19 Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, 131–37.

and the accusation that Jesus is possessed by Beelzebul (2:1–12; 3:1–6, 22–30), but they do not cause difficulty for the disciples. They accept and trust Jesus' and their own ability to heal, now that God's rule is here.

There are a few hints of limitation to healing power in the Markan narrative, and these have to do with trust. Trust that God's power is available for healing seems necessary both on the part of the healer and on the part of those being healed. Jesus tells the woman with the flow of blood, "Daughter, your trust has cured you" (5:34). Jesus is limited in what he can do in Nazareth because of the people's lack of trust: "He was unable to perform a single miracle there, except that he did cure a few by laying hands on them, though he was always shocked at their lack of trust" (6:5–6). Finally, in the healing of the boy with the unclean spirit, both the importance of trust and the disciples' difficulty around trust are recounted. The disciples (minus Peter, James, and John) attempt to exorcise a boy and fail; the father asks Jesus to help if he can. Jesus replies, "What do you mean, 'If you can'? Anything is possible for those who trust" (9:23), and casts the demon out of boy. It is not explicit in the narrative whether it is the father's lack of trust (he responds to Jesus, "I do trust! Help my lack of trust!" [9:24]), or the disciples' insufficient trust (or both) that caused the earlier failure. After the healing, the disciples ask Jesus privately why they could not exorcise the demon, and Jesus replies, "The only thing that can drive this kind out is prayer" (9:29), that is, explicit connection to God. Were the disciples perhaps trying to heal through their own or Jesus' power, not through connection to God? Overall, however, the disciples successfully heal and exorcise. They fulfill their mission to be agents of God's rule in proclaiming the good news and healing; they make appropriate use of God's power available to them through trust.

Nature Miracles

There are several "nature miracles" in Mark: the cluster of the two feedings-in-the-desert stories and two boat-storm miracles and the third boat scene that includes discussion of the feeding stories (4:35–41; 6:30–52; 8:1–10, 14–21), and the cursing of the fig tree and associated teaching surrounding the cleansing of the temple (11:12–14, 20–25). Jesus' resurrection and the empty grave may also be considered a nature miracle, a demonstration of God's power active on earth. In these stories, the disciples are much less successful. Indeed, they fail to understand the significance of the boat and feeding stories; they fail to understand that Jesus expects them to have access to God's power to control nature, just as they had access to God's power to heal and exorcise. They respond with fear not trust.

Shortly before the first boat episode, Jesus says to the disciples, "You have been given the secret of the empire of God" (4:11). In contrast to those outside who view Jesus as crazy, as possessed by a demon, or as a troublemaker, the disciples see God's rule at work in Jesus. But they have trouble discerning the extent of God's power available in the present, and they have trouble trusting it. In the first boat scene, a fierce squall is threatening to destroy the boat, and the disciples wake Jesus, not expecting him to do anything about the storm, but wanting him to share their fear: "Teacher, don't you care? We're sinking!" (4:38). Jesus calms the squall and asks the disciples, "Why are you such cowards? You still don't trust, do you?" (4:40). Jesus' saying implies that the disciples had no need to be afraid of the squall; if they had trusted, they would have known they were safe, and, even more, could have dealt with the storm themselves. Trust would have given them access to God's power over the threat of nature. The disciples respond, however, not to Jesus' saying to them about trust and what it can do, but with great fear at Jesus' apparent control over the storm. They have not learned about trust, how it makes available God's power to humans.

A few episodes later, after more and greater healings demonstrating Jesus' access to God's power, and after the disciples' own successful preaching and healing mission, the first desert feeding scene is narrated. It begins with the disciples taking the initiative: they come to Jesus concerned about food for the large crowd; they instruct Jesus to disband the crowd to go buy food. Jesus says, "Give them something to eat yourselves" (6:37). With the redundant "you," *humeis*, the emphasis is on the disciples' feeding them. They do not make any connection to God's power available to Jesus and to them, seen in the stilling of the storm and in the healings. They work on the level of customary human limitations, "Are we supposed to go out and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and donate it for their meal?" (6:37). Jesus inquires how many loaves they have; they produce five and two fish. Jesus orders the disciples to have everyone sit down, blesses the bread, and the disciples distribute the bread and fish to the whole crowd and gather up the abundant remains. The disciples fail to feed the crowd on their own initiative, but they are intimately involved with Jesus in the process of feeding them.²⁰ The audience may hope that perhaps the disciples are beginning to understand what they are called to do in inaugurating God's empire.

20 Suzanne Watts Henderson ("Concerning the Loaves': Comprehending Incomprehension in Mark 6:45–52," *JSNT* 83 [2001]: 3–26) argues persuasively that what the disciples fail to understand is their own active role in bringing about God's kingdom. She contrasts Mark's passage of the feeding with John's, showing how Mark's story involves the disciples as agents while John's pictures the disciples as foils to Jesus' power.

If so, the hearer's hopes are dashed in the following boat scene. Jesus sends the disciples ahead in the boat and they are straining at rowing against the wind. It does not occur to the disciples to try their own hand at stilling the wind, as they have tried their hands at healing and as they have witnessed Jesus doing in the first boat scene. They struggle on. Jesus "comes toward them walking on the sea and intending to go past them" (6:48). They scream out in terror, thinking he is a ghost. Jesus instructs them to take courage and not fear, joins them in the boat, and the wind stops. The narrator then relates to the hearer the disciples' incomprehension and connects it to their failure to understand the loaves: "(You see, they hadn't understood about the loaves; their minds were closed)" (6:50). The boat episodes and the feeding stories echo God's actions in the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings. This exodus context suggests that the "intending to go past them" echoes the theophany to Moses, where God passes by Moses' face (Exod 34:5–6, LXX). Suzanne Watts Henderson argues, convincingly I think, that the passing by was also intended to encourage the disciples to act on their own as they were invited to act—feed the crowds—in the first feeding story. They are faithfully following Jesus, but they are called to do more, to be active participants in spreading God's empire.²¹ Not seeing and perceiving God's power manifest in the multiplication of the loaves, they do not see or understand God's power available to tame the sea available to Jesus, let alone to themselves, although they have witnessed this power in the earlier boat narrative.

The disciples' inability to understand God's power available to Jesus and to themselves is dramatically confirmed in the second feeding episode. This time the crowd has been with Jesus three days, and Jesus summons the disciples and expresses compassion on the crowd and the need to provide food for them. With no apparent recollection whatsoever of the prior feeding and their role in it, the disciples say, "How can anyone feed these people bread out here in this desert place?" (8:4). Once again Jesus asks how many loaves they have, and has the disciples distribute the bread and the fish, and collect the scraps leftover. The hearer, if not the disciples, has grasped that God's power over nature in feeding thousands is available to those trusting God's empire.

There follows another boat scene. Jesus is with the disciples in the boat, and this time the sea and the wind are not a threat; rather the disciples'

21 Henderson argues on the basis of Hebrew Bible parallels that, for Mark, Jesus in coming near but intending to pass by is hoping to remind and empower the disciples to do what it is possible for them to do ("Concerning the Loaves," 20–21). See also Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, SNTSMS 135 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

understanding—or lack of understanding—of the feedings is the issue. The disciples discuss among themselves that they have forgotten to bring bread and have only one loaf. It does not occur to them that if five loaves could feed five thousand, and seven loaves could feed four thousand, one loaf could surely feed the people in the boat. Jesus upbraids them: “Why are you talking about bread you don’t have? You still don’t get it, do you? You still haven’t got the point, have you? Are you just closed-minded? You have eyes, but you still don’t see, and you have ears, but you still don’t hear. Don’t you even remember ...” (8:17–18). Jesus asks them how many loaves and how many baskets left over for each feeding, and concludes, “You still don’t understand, do you?” (8:21). Whether or not the disciples have finally understood, the implied hearer is certainly exhorted to understand, to understand that God’s power to provide food in the desert and control the waters is available to Jesus, and perhaps also to them.²²

The next nature miracle, the cursing of the fig tree, reiterates the theme that all things are possible, that God’s power is indeed available to those who trust. The theme first occurred in the healing of the epileptic, where the father cries out, “I do trust! Help my lack of trust!” (9:24). As noted earlier, Jesus connects this healing explicitly with prayer. The next occurrence is in response to the disciples’ query of how can anybody be saved if the rich cannot. This time it is explicitly connected to God’s empire. Jesus observes, “How difficult it is for those with money to enter God’s empire!” The disciples then ask in amazement, “Well then, who can be saved?” Jesus responds, “For humans it’s impossible, but not for God; you see, everything’s possible for God” (10:23, 26, 27).

Then, on the way into Jerusalem, Jesus curses the fig tree for having only leaves not fruit, and the disciples hear the curse. The next morning, Peter observes, “Rabbi, Look! the fig tree you cursed has withered” (11:21).²³ Jesus’ reply connects the withering of the fig tree to trust and prayer. He commands the disciples, “Have trust in God. Let me tell you: those who say to this mountain, ‘Up with you and into the sea!’ and do not waver in their conviction, but trust

22 With his future orientation for the followers’ work of bringing about God’s empire, Culpepper sees the storms at sea as “a metaphor for the life-threatening opposition Jesus and his disciples *will* face in proclaiming the coming kingdom among the Gentiles” *Mark*, 20 (italics mine).

23 That this is a miracle of destruction of nature rather than of control or abundance is not relevant to my argument about the power of God available to humans who trust. Its narrative function appears to be to underscore the cleansing of the temple as its proleptic destruction. David Rhoads has suggested that in the rule of God perhaps trees should bear fruit all year round.

that what they say will happen, that's the way it will be. This is why I keep telling you, trust that you will receive everything you pray and ask for, and that's the way it will turn out" (11:22–24). In this statement, Jesus asserts the availability of God's power (now that God's empire is breaking in on earth) for all who trust. Loaves can be multiplied, sea squalls and winds can be calmed, fig trees can be destroyed, if the one praying trusts in God, i.e. trusts that in these new days of God's rule on earth, God's power is available to them. The hearer does not know if the disciples are able to trust, if the disciples yet trust their access to God's power and can act upon it. But the hearer does know that in the Markan narrative world, God's power is available to all who trust. The final 'nature miracle', the empty tomb, will be discussed below.

In summary thus far, the disciples are called to be with Jesus, and to proclaim and heal. They are to be fishers of people, to be agents spreading and enabling the in-breaking of God's rule. They are faithful in continuing with Jesus, and when Jesus sends them out, they successfully exorcise, heal, and proclaim the good news. The arrival of God's rule also entails control over nature, seen in the sea and feeding stories and in the instruction on prayer. Here the disciples fail; they respond in amazement and fear; they do not understand; they do not grasp that they can share in this power of feeding multitudes as they share in God's healing power. Their trust in the arrival of God's rule goes only so far.

The New Community and Persecution from the Powers-that-Be

In the Markan narrative world, God's power is available for healing, for exorcism, and over the natural world. But God's power is apparently not available to humans, even to Jesus, to control other humans. The invitation to embrace the rule of God is open to all, but no one is forced to enter God's empire. People are free to embrace or resist God's in-breaking rule until it arrives in full power, which the narrative expects in the near future (9:1). Until that happens, the powers-that-be still have the power to crucify Jesus and to persecute the disciples. Jesus can outsmart and out-argue his opponents, but he can neither convince them that he is truly showing the way of God nor escape their vengeance if they try to destroy him. John the Baptist was arrested and executed. As early as Mark 3:6, the Pharisees and the Herodians "hatched a plot against him, to destroy him." Jesus will be crucified, and the disciples will be handed over to Sanhedrins, governors, and kings (13:9). Furthermore, while the rule of God has indeed arrived, making possible the healings, abundant food in the desert, and control over the sea, the Markan Jesus cannot even get the disciples to trust fully and thus live out God's empire.

I noted above early hints at the disciples' lack of understanding. They do not understand the parable of the seed and sower (4:10, 13), but then Jesus "would explain everything in private to his own disciples" (4:34). Even with this advantage, the disciples ask Jesus about the clean and unclean (7:17). Their lack of understanding is further emphasized in the third boat scene described above. In Mark 8:27–10:52, the way section, the narrative shows the disciples gradually coming to accept persecution as the lot of disciples in this age. At the same time, it explores the ways the disciples not only lack understanding but also misunderstand the nature of God's rule. The Markan disciples seem to understand God's empire as a typical human institution like Caesar's empire, in which they try to control its boundaries and have status for themselves. On the other hand, Jesus teaches that the rule of God is open to everyone and the disciples' particular role is to be "last of all and servant of all" (9:35); Jesus instructs them, "You know how those who supposedly rule over foreigners lord it over them, and how their strong men tyrannize them. But it's not going to be like that with you! With you, whoever wants to become great must be your servant, and whoever among you wants to be 'number one' must be everybody's slave" (10:42–44). The disciples are called to be fishers of people, to expand the membership of God's empire, yet they seek to restrict it.

At Mark 8:29, Peter recognizes Jesus as the Christ. Then Jesus for the first time prophesies his execution and resurrection. Peter objects strongly, and Jesus responds even more strongly: "Get out of my sight, you Satan, you, because you're not thinking in God's terms, but in human terms" (8:33). The passion-resurrection prediction is followed by teaching on discipleship; Jesus issues a general invitation to follow, telling the disciples and the crowd that it involves taking up one's cross, that instrument of execution. "Remember, if you try to save your life, you'll lose it, but if you lose your life for the sake of the good news, you'll save it. After all, what good does it do to acquire the whole world and forfeit your life? Or, what would you give in exchange for life?" (8:35–36). Life in the rule of God does not reflect our usual survival values. However little they understand, the disciples do continue to follow, to be with Jesus.

After the second passion-resurrection prediction Jesus asks the disciples what they were discussing on the way: "And they fell silent, because on the way they had been bickering about who was greatest." At this point Jesus responds, "If any of you wants to be 'number one,' you have to be last of all and servant of all" (9:35). And to demonstrate what he means, he welcomes a child, a person without status in the ancient world, and says that to welcome a child is to welcome him, and the one who sent him. As fishers of people, the disciples should be welcoming others. Next John tells Jesus that they were trying to stop someone casting out demons in Jesus' name because he was not following them.

They were trying to establish boundaries to God's rule with themselves as an in-group. Jesus tells them not to stop him: "For whoever is not against us is on our side" (9:40). Following some public controversy and private explanation to the disciples on divorce, people were bringing children to Jesus for him to lay his hands on them. Even after Jesus' earlier instruction on welcoming children, the disciples try to stop them from coming. Jesus again instructs the disciples: "Let the children come up to me; don't try to stop them. After all, God's empire belongs to people like these" (10:14). It seems that the disciples are not learning the nature of the community of God's empire.

A third time Jesus predicts his passion-resurrection. Since it is the third repetition the audience may hope for a shift—perhaps the disciples will do better. However, James and John come and ask Jesus privately for the seats of power and honor on his right and left in the age to come. This suggests that they have at least grasped that they are to be last and servants in this age. But they are still seeking status: if they cannot have it in this age, perhaps they can in the age to come! Jesus asks if they can endure persecution as he will, and they say they can. So he tells them they will indeed undergo persecution, but the seats are not his to give. Jesus again instructs all the disciples to be servants and slaves of all.

The fact that James and John say they can drink the cup and undergo the baptism Jesus will undergo suggests that they have come to accept that persecution as well as healing is part of God's empire as long as this age continues. This is confirmed in the passion narrative: "And Jesus says to them, 'You will all be shaken and fall away....' Peter said to him, 'Even if everyone else is shaken and falls away, I won't!' And Jesus says to him, 'Let me tell you: tonight before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.' But he repeated it with more bluster: 'Even if they condemn me to die with you, I will never disown you!' And so said they all" (14:27–31). They do grasp that persecution comes with the territory. Even their failure to live it out may not be the end for the disciples: Jesus has told James and John they will be persecuted *if* they are able to endure it. When the Markan Jesus is praying in Gethsemane and returns to find the disciples sleeping, he says, "Be alert and pray that you won't be put to the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (14:38).

The male disciples do indeed fail. They all flee when Jesus is arrested. When put to the test, their trust in God's rule is not sufficient, and they abandon Jesus in fear. Peter still follows into the courtyard, but then denies knowing Jesus, weeping when he realizes what he has done. The women disciples, whom we are now told have been there all along and have come up to Jerusalem with Jesus, do not yet flee. They are faithful watchers through the crucifixion and burial and go out to the tomb to anoint Jesus. The young man in white tells

them that Jesus is raised and going ahead of them to Galilee, and that they should go tell the male disciples, even Peter. Then the women “ran away from the tomb, because great fear and excitement got the better of them. And they didn’t breathe a word of it to anyone: talk about terrified....” (16:8). And so Mark’s Gospel ends. The women have fled in their turn. They fail, however, not in face of danger and persecution, but in face of glory, in face of evidence of God’s power active in Jesus: the empty tomb and the promise to see Jesus in Galilee. Their reaction at the empty tomb is similar to the male disciples’ reaction to the two sea episodes, the stilling of the storm and the walking on water, when they respond in fear. The women, like the male disciples, do not trust the power of God active now that God’s rule is breaking in on earth.

In conclusion, then, the disciples are called to trust the good news of the in-breaking of God’s rule and to change their ways. They are called to be fishers of people, to be with Jesus, and to proclaim the good news of God’s empire, and to heal and exorcise. They become participants in the healings, and, when sent out, proclaim and heal. They witness Jesus’ control over nature in the sea and feeding episodes, but they do not even perceive the invitation to see that God’s power is available to them as well. They trust enough in God’s empire already available on earth to heal and exorcise, but they do not trust the power of God enough to take initiative themselves in feeding crowds in the desert or calming seas. They are taught that God’s rule is not to be like Caesar’s rule, and they are to be servants and least, though they have trouble doing so. They initially reject but then accept the idea that Jesus and they will be persecuted. Finally, the male disciples and the women are told that Jesus is going ahead of them back to Galilee, the place of the in-breaking of God, and there they will see him.

The failures of the disciples are well known. But viewing the disciples from the perspective that the watershed event is the in-breaking of God’s rule at the opening of the Gospel shifts the emphasis to their failure to see and trust the power of God now available on earth. It is the *good news* of God’s empire that the disciples are unable fully to trust—in the two sea miracles, in the two desert feedings, and in the empty tomb and the promise to again be with Jesus in Galilee—more than the bad news of Jesus’ death and their own persecution. In face of God’s actions, the male followers and the female followers react with fear, not trust. They have not been able fully to trust the good news of God’s empire. And as a result, they have not fully acted as fishers of people bringing others in. They could not always heal, they were not able to feed the crowds themselves in the desert, and eventually they all fled. The promise remains to go back to Galilee, the place of the in-breaking of God’s rule, and begin again. The future for the Jesus followers that Alan Culpepper points to is possible here as well.

For the audience hearing the Gospel of Mark told is still present. The audience has not yet failed; they are still listening. *They* are faced with the challenge: do they wish to embrace God's empire? Do they wish to trust the rule of God—and to participate in both the costs and the joys of discipleship? They have witnessed the struggles of the disciples, their successes and failures. Indeed, following the varied fortunes of the disciples has helped to maintain plot interest throughout the narrative. Given that ancient audiences would be accustomed to teaching through negative examples, examples of how not to behave, they would probably take the failures less seriously than modern scholars usually do and view them more as challenges and learnings for themselves. They would be reassured that failures as well as successes are part of discipleship. As participants in God's rule, are they able to heal? Are they able to trust in God's power available to them in nature? Knowing that, in the present age, humans are free to reject God's rule and to persecute those who embrace that rule, are they able to face the real possibility of persecution? Twice the audience has heard that Jesus will go ahead of them to Galilee, the place of the in-breaking of God's rule, and there they will see him. Will they choose metaphorically to go to Galilee to be with Jesus and participate in God's rule?

Gospel of Luke



Illuminating “Christ Among the Doctors” (Luke 2:41–52) in the Exegetical Tradition and Select Florentine Renaissance Paintings

Heidi J. Hornik and Mikeal C. Parsons

Introduction

This essay builds on the work we did together in the trilogy, *Illuminating Luke*.¹ Alan Culpepper was an early proponent of this work, writing letters of support in our efforts to raise funds for travel and copyright permissions and later in our attempts to find a publisher. He also wrote one of the first endorsements of the published work. In combing back through our materials, we discovered that “Christ Among the Doctors” (Luke 2:41–52) was part of the original conception for the project. The earliest reference we found to “Christ Among the Doctors” was in a grant proposal written in 1997. At the time of the proposal, we were imagining one large volume of fifteen chapters with one hundred or so images. Thinking we would be unable to find a publisher to undertake such an ambitious project, we decided to divide the project into three parts (infancy narrative, public ministry, and passion/resurrection narratives). Since the status of the story of the twelve-year old Jesus in the temple as part of the infancy narrative proper has long been questioned (see below under “Overview of the Biblical Text”), and in order to keep balance in the three volumes, we reluctantly removed that subject from the first volume. By the time the research began in earnest in the summer of 1999, it was no longer part of the table of contents. We are pleased to be able now twenty years later to return to this topic.²

Jesus among the Doctors has been a popular theme across the history of Christian art. Artists of this subject have drawn on Luke 2:41–52, the only

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- 1 See Heidi J. Hornik and Mikeal C. Parsons, *Illuminating Luke*, 3 vols. (New York: Continuum, 2003, 2005, 2008).
 - 2 We are delighted also to present our findings in a volume honoring our dear friend, Alan Culpepper. Not only has Alan been instrumental in our professional lives (beginning with his role as Mikeal’s doctoral supervisor), he was the best man in our wedding. He has remained a supportive and encouraging presence in our lives, both personally and professionally, and we are deeply grateful for our friendship with Alan and Jacque.

canonical Gospel text that describes Jesus as a child (though see also the apocryphal Inf. Gos. Thom. 17). This essay will explore the text's history of interpretation, along with depictions of this scene in Florentine Renaissance painting (Giotto, Fra Angelico, and Alessandro Allori), with an eye toward their sources/precedents and the theological, political, and cultural context(s) that gave rise to each painting, as well as its place in the artists' oeuvre, stylistic and iconographic features. Our method, broadly conceived, is one of the reception history.³

Overview of the Biblical Text

⁴¹And his parents went every year to Jerusalem, at the solemn day of the pasch, ⁴²And when he was twelve years old, they going up into Jerusalem, according to the custom of the feast, ⁴³And having fulfilled the days, when they returned, the child Jesus remained in Jerusalem; and his parents knew it not. ⁴⁴And thinking that he was in the company, they came a day's journey, and sought him among their kinsfolks and acquaintance. ⁴⁵And not finding him, they returned into Jerusalem, seeking him.

⁴⁶And it came to pass, that, after three days, they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them, and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all that heard him were astonished at his wisdom and his answers. ⁴⁸And seeing him, they wondered. And his mother said to him: Son, why hast thou done so to us? behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. ⁴⁹And he said to them: How is it that you sought me? did you not know, that I must be about my father's business? ⁵⁰And they understood not the word that he spoke unto them.

⁵¹And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them. And his mother kept all these words in her heart. ⁵²And Jesus advanced in wisdom, and age, and grace with God and men.

DOUAY-RHEIMS⁴

3 For a detailed explanation of the method, see Hornik and Parsons, *Illuminating Luke*, 1:5–8.

4 We are citing from the Douay-Rheims translation, which was produced in 1609–10. While obviously not the translation which the artists and their patrons would have consulted (which would presumably have been the Vulgate), it represents a tradition much closer to that period. We used the Douay-Rheims translation in volumes 2 and 3 of *Illuminating Luke* in response to critical reviews of volume 1, in which we had used the NRSV.

Most modern commentators agree that Luke 2:41–52 is of a different character than the preceding Lukan infancy narrative.⁵ Raymond Brown, for example, has concluded that the story “can scarcely be called a section of the *infancy* narrative.”⁶ Rather it is an independent “canonical example of those stories of the ‘hidden life’ of Jesus (i.e., his life with his family at Nazareth before the ministry) which appear in the apocryphal gospels of subsequent centuries.”⁷ The general consensus regarding the function of the story, as it stands in Luke’s Gospel, is that it is transitional. As Culpepper has observed: “The story of Jesus in the Temple ... serves as a transition from the birth narratives to the ministry of Jesus.”⁸ The story also serves as a “transition between revelation about Jesus by others (angels, Simeon) and revelation that Jesus himself will proclaim; for in 2:41–52 Jesus speaks for the first time.”⁹

Many scholars think the passage is organized chastically or concentrically. John Carroll’s proposed structure is typical:

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- 5 In this section, we present an overview of modern interpretations of Luke 2:41–52 in order to provide an initial orientation for the reader to issues raised by the text. We understand and affirm that these modern interpretations are themselves part of the history of the text’s reception; however, we have limited our purview of reception history to those interpretations, ancient and medieval, that represent traditions accessible (at least chronologically) to the artists and their patrons.
 - 6 Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospel of Matthew and Luke*, new updated ed., ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 480. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I–IX)* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 435, goes so far as to say that the unit could be omitted “without any general loss to the narrative.” Mark Coleridge, on the other hand, argues that “the episode is the climax of the infancy narrative and therefore the ‘most important of the infancy narrative’—at least in narrative terms” (*The Birth of the Lukan Narrative: Narrative as Christology in Luke 1–2*, JSNT 88 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993], 189).
 - 7 Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 480. In the supplement published some fifteen years later, Brown asserts he finds no reason to amend the judgment that Luke 2:41–52 “probably was once an independent story and was rewritten and added here by Luke at a second stage of composition” (*Birth of the Messiah*, 689); so also, *inter alia*, Fitzmyer *Luke*, 436, who sees the story as “only loosely connected to what precedes,” and François Bovon, *Luke I: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. Christine M. Thomas, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 110, for whom the story resembles a biographical anecdote, containing a *bon mot*.
 - 8 R. Alan Culpepper, “Luke,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 9 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 76. Also Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 435.
 - 9 Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 481.

- A Jesus' parents journey to Jerusalem for the Passover. (vv. 41–42)
- B Jesus remains behind as his parents depart; they are unaware. (v. 43)
- C Jesus' parents seek and find him. (vv. 44–46a)
- D Jesus displays wisdom among the teachers. (vv. 46b–47)
- C' Jesus' parents reproach him. (v. 48)
- B' Jesus answers, though his parents do not understand (vv. 49–50)
- A' Jesus and his parents return to Nazareth. (v. 51a)¹⁰

The depiction of Mary and Joseph as pious and Torah-observant Jews (2:41–42) is in keeping with the presentation of characters elsewhere in the infancy narrative (1:6, 59; 2:21, 22–24, 25–27, 36–38).¹¹ The practice of Bar Mitzvah emerged after Jesus' day, and although there are rabbinic traditions indicating legal responsibilities for Jewish youth aged twelve or thirteen, there has emerged a scholarly agnostic posture with regard to whether "this later evidence applies to Jewish practice in Jesus' or Luke's time."¹²

Despite extensive speculation among ancient and modern commentators regarding the reasons Jesus was left behind in Jerusalem by his parents,¹³ the nature of the caravan, or the size of the traveling party (2:44–46a), Luke "shows no interest in such details."¹⁴ Nor does Luke offer any rationale for why it took three days for Jesus to be found (2:46), and most modern commentators agree that there is no allusion to Jesus' resurrection.¹⁵

10 John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2012), 85; see also Charles Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 37. Culpepper ("Luke," 76) admits "the story begins and ends with travel notices, as do other sections of Luke 1–2," but he rejects the variously proposed chiasmic structures that find the center in the temple teachers' praise of Jesus' wisdom and argues that the "dramatic center of the story" is "Jesus' response to his parents in v. 49." John Nolland (*Luke 1–9:20*, WBC 35A [Dallas: Word, 1989], 128) also rejects any structuring of the passage beyond "just a listing of the steps in the action of the story." Bovon, *Luke I*, 109, thinks such a "structural analysis does not do justice ... to the movement of the narrative."

11 Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke*, PCNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 58.

12 Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 691.

13 See, e.g., Darrell Bock, *Luke*, 2 vols., BECNT 3A (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 1:264–66.

14 Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 486.

15 Representative is Nolland (*Luke*, 130), who notes that the language "after three days" is not the terminology Luke uses in connection with the resurrection (cf. 8:3; 9:22; 10:34; 13:33) and thus "no symbolism is intended." Contra R. Laurentin, *Jésus au temple: Mystère de Pâques et foi Marie en Luc 2,48–50*, EBib (Paris: Gabalda, 1966), 101–02.

The concentric structure "puts the twelve-year-old's wisdom on display at the unit's center" (2:46b–47).¹⁶ Jesus' wisdom is disclosed primarily through his listening and questioning in the role of a pupil. Thus, despite the focus on Jesus' understanding and wisdom, to call Jesus a teacher on the basis of this story would be misleading.¹⁷ Nor is there any explicit disparaging of the Jewish leaders.¹⁸ In fact, they are the ones referred to not as scribes or lawyers but rather as "teachers" (*didaskoloi*), a term reserved for Jesus (3:12; 7:40; 8:49; 9:38; 10:25; 11:45; 12:13; 18:18; 20:21, 28, 39; 21:7; 22:11) or less frequently in a generic sense (6:40), but never outside this one occurrence in reference to the Jewish authorities.¹⁹ As Bovon notes, "The account is neither pro- nor anti-Jewish."²⁰

Others who reject the concentric structure (such as Culpepper above) find at the heart of the story not the praise of the Jewish teachers but Jesus' response to Mary's question: "Son, why hast thou done so to us? behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing" (2:48).²¹ That response is not a little ambiguous. The Greek is idiomatic and literally reads, "Did you not know that I must be in the ... of my Father (*en tois tou patros mou*)?" There is no specified substantive object of the preposition. So what does the idiom mean? The Douay-Rheims translation renders the phrase, "my father's business." The New Revised Standard Version has "in my Father's house." Those are the two major translational options.²² Based in part on this idiom's use in the LXX in reference to a dwelling-place (LXX Job 18:19; LXX Esther 7:9), most modern translations opt now for "house."²³

Joel Green has recognized a "competition for focal attention" between the account of Jesus with the teachers (2:46–47) and the exchange between Jesus and his parents (2:48–50).²⁴ Being "among the teachers" "draws attention to Jesus' status as a person already known from an early age for his wisdom. This might recommend Jesus as a messianic figure endowed with divine wisdom and certify Jesus' heroic character in a way appreciated by the Greco-Roman

16 Carroll, *Luke*, 85.

17 I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 128.

18 Contra the presentation in the Inf. Gos. Thom.; see below.

19 On this point see also Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 488 n. 32.

20 Bovon, *Luke*, 110.

21 Culpepper, "Luke," 76.

22 Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 476, cites a third: "in or among the household (relatives) of my (heavenly) Father." But Brown (477) cites little support for this rendering, noting "the impossibility that Jesus would have spoken of the teachers of the Law in the Temple as 'the household (family) of my Father.'"

23 See also Josephus, *Contra Apion* 1.18.118; cf. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 467–76.

24 Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 155.

world.”²⁵ “On the other hand,” Green notes, “vying for center stage is the reply of Jesus to his mother in 2:49. This is the scene’s dramatic nucleus.”²⁶

Jesus’ parents do not understand this response (2:50).²⁷ The scene ends with a double summary. Luke 2:51a expresses Jesus’ obedience to his parents, which is parallel to the depiction of their obedience to the Law, and represents a fitting ending to this story.²⁸ The final note echoes earlier statements in the infancy narrative: Mary “kept all these things in her heart” (2:51b; cf. 2:19) and “Jesus advanced in wisdom, and age, and grace with God and men” (2:52; cf. 2:40). While the scene emphasizes the divine nature of Jesus’ nurture and training (2:49), there is equal emphasis on Jesus’ human nature and nurture; he is progressing in favor with both God and humanity.²⁹ Many of the issues raised in the modern commentary tradition are found also in the patristic and medieval interpretive tradition, though the lines of argument and conclusions reached are frequently different.

Reception and Interpretation

One of the earliest interpretations of Luke 2:41–52 is the apocryphal re-telling preserved in the second-century Infancy Gospel of Thomas (Inf. Gos. Thom.), which contains “hidden life” stories that depict that Jesus was “God’s Son even as a boy by having him work miracles just as he does in the ministry.”³⁰ The last story in Inf. Gos. Thom. (17:1–5) closely follows the canonical Luke (including the idiomatic, *en tois tou patros mou*), with two notable embellishments. In 17:2, the author adds content to explain the audience’s amazement: they were

25 Green, *Luke*, 155.

26 Green, *Luke*, 156. Culpepper (“Luke,” 77) agrees, calling 2:48–50 the “climax of the story.”

27 Though modern commentators have “identified different ways what exactly it was that puzzled the parents” (Coleridge, *The Birth of the Lukan Narrative*, 207 n. 1; see there for the various interpretations). Ancient and medieval interpreters were uneasy with any suggestion that Mary lacked understanding of Jesus’ vocation (see below).

28 See Culpepper, “Luke,” 77.

29 Parsons, *Luke*, 59.

30 Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 481. See also Tony Chartrand-Burke, “Completing the Gospel: The Infancy Gospel of Thomas as a Supplement to the Gospel of Luke,” in *The Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity: Proceedings of the Montréal Colloquium in Honour of Charles Kannengiesser, 11–13 October 2006*, ed. Lorenzo DiTommaso and Lucian Turcescu, *The Bible in Ancient Christianity* 6 (Leiden: Boston, 2008), 101–119; Paul Foster, “The Reception of the Canonical Gospels in the Non-Canonical Gospels,” *Early Christianity* 4 (2013): 281–309.

"surprised how he questioned the elders and explained the main points of the law and the riddles and the parables of the prophets."³¹ One tradition (sixth century Syriac W), adds the note that Jesus "brings these teachers to silence."³² Here then is a hint of tension between Jesus and the religious authorities that is typical of the public ministry in canonical Luke (and seen also in earlier episodes in 1GT; e.g., 3:1–2). Furthermore, while the reference to the Temple authorities as "teachers" seems less charged in the context of canonical Luke (where Jesus' opponents are regularly called scribes and Pharisees), in Inf. Gos. Thom. There are several episodes in which Jesus has direct conflict with various teachers attempting to teach him his letters.³³ The religious leaders (now referred to as scribes and Pharisees) readily acknowledge the intellectual prowess of Jesus to his parents ("The scribes and the Pharisees said to Mary, 'Are you the mother of this child?' She said, 'I am.' And they said to her, 'Blessed are you, because the Lord God has blessed the fruit of your womb. For such wisdom and praise and glory of virtue we have never seen nor heard'; 17:4). This admission contributes to the depiction of Jesus' superiority over the religious authorities in a much more explicit way than is found in Luke 2. This tension between Jesus and the religious authorities will re-emerge in certain visual depictions (see below).³⁴

Origen gives the reference to Jesus among the teachers a homiletical turn, aimed at his fellow Christians: "Seek him among the teachers who are 'in the temple.' ... For, if you seek him in this way, you will find him. But, if anyone says he is a teacher and does not possess Jesus, he is a teacher only in name and Jesus, who is God's Word and Wisdom, cannot be found with him. He was found, Scripture says, 'in the midst of the teachers'" (*Homilies on the Gospel of Luke* 18).³⁵

31 The translation is taken from Tony Burke, ed. and trans., *De infantia Iesu evangelium Thomae graece*, Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum 17 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), 332–337. We follow his numbering system (chapter 17 in Burke is chapter 19 in other translations and editions).

32 See Burke, *De infantia Iesu*, 336 n. 1.

33 Typically a teacher is called *kathēgētēs* in Inf. Gos. Thom. (e.g., 4:1–4; 7:1), but several times the term *didaskolos* is used (13:1; 14:1; the same term found in Inf. Gos. Thom 17:2 and Luke 2).

34 While clearly the apocryphal Gospels had made inroads into medieval and Renaissance Christian art, there is no way to disaggregate whether that contact was direct or mediated through certain popular and "orthodox" literary traditions, such as Pseudo-Bonaventure's *Meditations on the Life of Christ*.

35 The translation is from Joseph T. Lienhard, trans., *Origen: Homilies on Luke. Fragments on Luke* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press of America, 1996), 77.

Other early versions focus on the nature(s) of Jesus revealed in the story. The humanity of Jesus was emphasized by his encounter with the religious teachers: "Because he was a small child, he is found 'in their midst,' not teaching them but 'asking questions.' He did this because it suited his age, to teach us what befits boys, even if they are wise and learned. They should rather hear their teachers than want to teach them and not show off with empty displays" (Origen, *Homilies on the Gospel of Luke* 19.6). Jesus also revealed his humanity through his humble obedience to the Law (attending the Passover). Christ "himself kept the law which he gave in order to show us, who are human beings pure and simple, that whatever God orders is to be observed in everything" (Bede, *Homilies on the Gospels* 1.19).³⁶

Bede clearly saw the dual divine/human nature of Jesus disclosed in Luke 2: "the Lord said, 'I must be about my Father's business,' and this is a declaration of his power and glory which are coeternal with God the Father's. However, when he returned to Nazareth, he was subject to his parents, and this is an indication of his true humanity as well as an example of humility" (*Homilies on the Gospels*, 1:19). Ambrose, among many others, saw the "three days" of Mary and Joseph's searching as a "sign that he who was believed dead for our faith would rise again" (Ambrose, *Exposition of the Gospel of Luke* 2.63).

St. Augustine uses Luke 2 to explore the relationship between Jesus' divine and human parentage:

When Mary said *Your father and I have been very worried looking for you*, he answered, *Did you not know that I have to be about my Father's business?* Because he was not willing to be their son in such a way that they didn't realize he was the Son of God. The Son of God is always the Son of God, the one who created them, after all. But as son of man, born in time of the virgin without seed of her husband, he still had each of them as a parent. How do we prove this? Mary has already said, *Your father and I have been very worried, looking for you*.

SERMON 51.17³⁷

The focus on the role of Jesus' parents, especially Mary, gains momentum in medieval interpretation. One source of crucial importance for understanding

36 The translation is from the Venerable Bede, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles: Translated with an Introduction and Notes*, trans. Lawrence T. Martin (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1989).

37 The translation is from St. Augustine, *Sermons. III (51–94) on the New Testament*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991).

the visual tradition of Luke 2:41–52 is Pseudo-Bonaventure's *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, an enormously popular work by a Franciscan monk living in Tuscany during the late thirteenth/early fourteenth century.³⁸ Many of the gaps in the story are filled by this account. Jesus is separated from his parents because Mary and Joseph traveled by different roads to the place they were to spend the night: "Seeing Joseph without the Boy, who she thought had accompanied him, the Lady asked, 'Where is the Boy?' He replied, 'I do not know, because He did not return with me, and I thought that He had come with you.' And moved to tears by her strong sorrow, she said, 'He did not come with me. Now I see that I did not take good care of my Son'" (*Meditations* 86–87). On that first sleepless night, Mary prays a heartfelt (and long) prayer that begins: "My God, eternal Father, most clement and benign, it pleased you to give me your Son, and now I have lost Him and do not know where He is. Given Him back to me, O Father" (*Meditations* 88).

This sorrow is only intensified over the next three days as they search for Jesus in vain. Finally when they find Jesus in the temple and before she questions him, the writer describes their reunion:

On perceiving Him, she was cheered, almost restored, and knelt in tears to thank God. When the boy Jesus saw her, He came, and she received Him in her arms, clasping him tightly, kissing Him gently, pressing Him to her cheek, and holding Him to her bosom. In this way she restored herself, for she could not have spoken while she was overcome with emotion. Then she looked at Him and said, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I looked for you in sorrow."

MEDITATIONS, 91

Before concluding the recounting of the story, the author turns from Mary to address the question of what Jesus was doing in the intervening three days (besides interacting with the temple teachers): "But what did the Boy do on those three days? Follow Him solicitously as He goes to a hospice for the poor and meekly asks for shelter. There the poor Jesus eats and sleeps with the poor. Now see Him as He sits among the doctors, with pleasant, wise, and reverent expression, listening and asking questions, almost as though ignorant. He did this for the sake of humility and also that they might not be ashamed by His

38 The following translations are taken from Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green, eds., *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, trans. Isa Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).

marvelous responses" (*Meditations* 92). From this, the author draws out implications upon which the audience should "meditate":

These events will lead you to meditate on three very noble things. The first is that he who would approach God must not stay among relatives, but must leave them. Therefore the boy Jesus departed from His sweet mother when He wished to attend to the work of the Father, and when inquiry was made to His relatives and friends He was not found there either. The second is that he who lives spiritually should not marvel if at times he seems abandoned by God, with arid mind, since this happened to the mother of God. But his mind should not become lukewarm, but should diligently look for God by persevering in holy meditation and good deeds, and thus he will find Him again. The third is that no one should act by his own judgment and will.

MEDITATIONS, 92–94

Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, because of its focus, has little on this text. But it does discuss briefly the role of Mary in providing information to Luke for the composition of his Gospel:

This gospel was disclosed by the Virgin Mary. The Blessed Virgin kept all these things in her heart, pondering them diligently, as we read in chapter 2 of Luke, in order to be able to communicate them to writers, as the Gloss on this passage says: "She kept in her memory everything she knew about the Lord and what the Lord did and said, so that when the time came to preach or write about the incarnation, she could adequately make known all that had been said and done, to those who sought information."³⁹

The story of the boy Jesus in the Temple has drawn a great deal of attention from a variety of perspectives. One largely overlooked in the history of interpretation has been the reception of this pericope in the visual tradition.⁴⁰

39 Translation from Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Ryan Granger (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 639.

40 Another important source that we have consulted in previous work on visual depictions of Scripture is Cornelius A. Lapide, *The Great Commentary: The Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke*, trans. Thomas W. Mossman (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, 2008). Since the commentary on Luke was produced after the latest of our artists (after 1616), we do

Three Depictions of *Christ Among the Doctors*

The visual examples selected to discuss this text are executed by Florentine artists. Each one represents one of the major periods in the history of Renaissance art. The roots of the Renaissance are found in the works of Giotto in the *Trecento* (1300s). Giotto observes his world and begins to paint from nature. Fra Angelico in the *Quattrocento* (1400s) masters one-point linear perspective but introduces a beauty and harmony to his figures and landscape. The sixteenth-century or *Cinquecento* style is also called the Late Renaissance or Mannerism when artists transition away from the highly symmetrical and balanced compositions that preceded them. The 1500s are also the time of great political and religious upheaval in Western culture. Alessandro Allori populates his composition with multiple figures and anticipates the flamboyant Baroque of the seventeenth-century. By studying the theme of Jesus Among the Doctors, the reader/viewer will not only get a sense of its interpretation by these artists but also of the collective progression of three centuries of Italian painting as it evolved through Renaissance Tuscany.

Giotto is considered by many to be the father of the Renaissance. He developed a new pictorial style that revolutionized painting. Giovanni Boccaccio stated that Giotto "brought back the light" the art of painting "that for many centuries had been buried under the errors of some who painted more to delight the eyes of the ignorant than to praise the intellect of the wise" (*Decameron* 6.5). Giotto observed nature and tried to be faithful to the human, natural Italian world in which he lived.⁴¹ This was a dramatic change from the artificial, flat manner from the Byzantine East. Contemporary artists were fascinated and imitated this new style that required the painter to look at models as well as the objects in nature. Patronage was plentiful and wealthy men enjoyed having their portraits included in the saints and characters in the frescoes being painted on chapel walls. The sale of indulgences and church patronage as a form of absolution of sins and insurance of gaining entrance into heaven was rampant.

The Scrovegni Chapel, located in the small university town of Padua, not far from Venice, is Giotto's masterpiece. The chapel was originally built on a

not take up Lapide here. Still, his comments on Luke 2:41–52, which also cite insights from earlier commentators are instructive (292–307).

41 Frederick Hartt and David G. Wilkins, *History of Italian Renaissance Art* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2011), 73. See also Anne Derbes and Mark Sandona, *The Usurer's Heart: Giotto, Enrico Scrovegni, and the Arena Chapel in Padua* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008).

Roman arena so is often referred to as the Arena Chapel. The cycle consists of frescoes on all four walls and was painted when Giotto was about twenty-five years old for the very wealthy and powerful Paduan patron, Enrico Scrovegni. Scrovegni was notorious for lending money at a very high interest rate and probably built this chapel with the hope of having his sins of usury forgiven. As with many famous fresco cycles, the iconographic program was developed by theological advisors, and perhaps even the patron, alongside the young artist. The chapel is dedicated to the Virgin of Charity and has thirty-eight individual framed scenes from the Life of Christ and the Life of the Virgin. Each narrative is approximately a 6' 6" × 6' 6" square. The events from the Life of the Virgin are taken from the *Golden Legend*, written in the thirteenth century by the Genoese bishop Jacobus de Voragine.

Christ Among the Doctors (Fig. 11.1) is located on the second of three levels on the north wall as part of the scenes depicting the Ministry of Christ. The Infancy of Christ scenes progress chronologically from the right (south) of the altar wall (east) on the second level of the chapel. The *Nativity and Annunciation to the Shepherds* is the first scene on this level and is closest to the altar on the south wall. The narrative frescoes progress in a clockwise manner on the south wall away from the altar (*Adoration of the Magi*, *Presentation of Christ in the Temple*, *Flight into Egypt*, and *Massacre of the Innocents*) towards the entrance wall in the west. On the other side of the entrance wall on the north wall, the cycle continues with the Ministry of Christ. The painted episodes on the north wall are *Jesus Among the Doctors*, *Baptism of Christ*, *Marriage Feast at Cana*, *Raising of Lazarus*, *Entry into Jerusalem*, and *Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple*.

Giotto's painted compositions also use architecture in an innovative way. The architecture creates a sense of depth on a flat wall. This is evident in *Jesus Among the Doctors*. Jesus is seated in the central nave under a vaulted arch in the Temple. Scripture states that all of the figures are inside the Temple so Giotto widens the nave area, adds two niches flanking the central arch, and allows the vaulting of the side aisles to be visible.⁴² Everyone is "under" and "inside" the Temple listening to Jesus. The doctors, or Jewish religious authorities, are in a complex, and unusually deep, semi-circular spatial recession that is not found in any of the other fresco narratives set in an interior.⁴³ This is a remarkable development in painting. The fresco has been restored on several

42 Francesco Benelli, *The Architecture in Giotto's Paintings* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 96.

43 Bruce Cole, *Giotto: The Scrovegni Chapel, Padua* (New York: Braziller, 1993), 81.



FIGURE 11.1 Giotto, *Christ Among the Doctors*, c. 1302–1305, *Scrovegni Chapel, Padua*.

occasions and was nearly destroyed when an Allied bomb barely missed the chapel during World War II.⁴⁴

Five doctors sit on either side of Jesus. Giotto depicts the moment in which Joseph and Mary find Jesus in the Temple. They are seen standing on the left side of the painting behind the seated doctors. They gesture toward Jesus who remains calm and unaffected by their presence or their concern. There is no apparent tension between them nor are the religious authorities depicted in any menacing or disparaging way. It is appropriate that Giotto and the theologians began the public ministry of Christ with this narrative to make clear that Jesus is doing God's work and will not be interrupted.

By 1440, the leading painter in Florence was a Dominican monk first mentioned as Fra Giovanni da Fiesole but better known today as Fra Angelico.

44 Leonetto Tintori, "Studies for the Preservation of the Frescoes by Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel at Padua I: The state of conservation of the frescoes and the principal technical restoration problems," *Studies in Conservation* 8 (1963): 37–41.

Filippo Brunelleschi and Tommaso Masaccio had developed one-point linear perspective, allowing artists to paint three-dimensional figures and landscape to look realistic on a two-dimensional surface. This furthered the desire to paint from observation begun by Giotto in the 1300s. Fra Angelico knew of Masaccio and learned one-point linear perspective thanks to the technique being codified by Leon Battista Alberti in his written treatise, *On Painting* (1435 in Latin; 1436 in the vernacular Italian). Fra Angelico used perspective but also chose luminous colors and reflected light to emphasize beauty rather than suffering in his paintings of Christ's death and deposition from the cross. His work is characterized by emotional restraint and grace. He incorporated the new naturalism with monumental harmony of figures and landscape.⁴⁵ Of all the religious orders, only the Dominicans considered visual images so crucial to prayer, meditation, and study that they actually mandated the use of images in their dormitories in San Marco.

This panel of *Christ Among the Doctors* (Fig. 11.2) was originally painted for the doors of a reliquary cupboard—known as the Armadio degli Argenti—located in the second chapel on the left in the Servite church of Santissima Annunziata, Florence. The Servites, or the Ordine dei Servi di Maria, were founded in 1234 by seven Florentines. The Church of Santissima Annunziata was built in 1250 and reconstructed by Michelozzo between 1444 and 1481. At this time ss. Annunziata and the Servite order were able to glorify their order and the Virgin through the commissioning of altarpieces to the leading artists of this time: Baccio d'Agnolo, Leonardo da Vinci, Filippino Lippi, and Pietro Perugino.⁴⁶

There are three large panels that contained forty-one scenes on the silver reliquary cabinet. Thirty-two are extant and in the Museo di San Marco in Florence. According to contemporary tradition, the commission for these panels was received from Piero di Cosimo de' Medici (1416–1469).⁴⁷ Piero was the son of Cosimo the Elder, the patriarch of the famous Florentine Medici family. Scholars disagree on the date that work on the Armadio began (it varies from 1448 to 1450) but all agree that it was completed by 1452. There are twenty-seven scenes from the Life of Christ, from the *Annunciation* to the *Ascension*, as well as *Pentecost*, the *Last Judgment*, and *Christ in Paradise*.⁴⁸ Nine scenes are on the

45 Hartt and Wilkins, *History of Italian Renaissance Art*, 224.

46 Hornik and Parsons, *Illuminating Luke*, 3:104.

47 Laurence Kanter and Pia Palladino, *Fra Angelico*, exhibit catalogue, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 145.

48 Cyril Gerbron, "Le Christ est une page: exégèse et mémoire dans l'armadio degli argenti de Fra Angelico," *Histoire de l'art* 71 (2012): 51–62.



FIGURE 11.2 *Fra Angelico, Christ Among the Doctors, c. 1450–52, Reliquary Silver Cabinet, Museo di San Marco, Florence.*

panel that begins chronologically with the Vision of Ezekiel. The scenes then continue from right to left in three horizontal registers: *Annunciation, Nativity and Announcment to the Shepherds, Circumcision, Adoration of the Magi, Presentation in the Temple, Flight to Egypt, Massacre of the Innocents, and Jesus in the Temple with the Doctors*. The tempera (egg yolk and water) painting is on

wood panel, and each square measures approximately 15" × 15". Like much of Fra Angelico's work from his mature period, numerous assistants were present in his large workshop.

The church architecture in Fra Angelico's *Jesus Among the Doctors*, as in Giotto's version, situates, as well as frames, the characters in the biblical story. Jesus is centered, this time under the middle (and tallest) of three pointed Gothic arches. He is placed in front of a hanging tapestry. Five doctors are on the right side of the composition. Mary and Joseph have entered the Temple from the left and stand in front of the other seated doctors. Fra Angelico uses strong, local colors. Jesus is considerably younger and smaller in this painting and raises his right hand either to greet his parents or continue his oration.

It was typical for Angelico to include scripture passages above and below the panels. The relevant NT text is inscribed along the bottom; in this case an abridged form of Luke 2:46 in Latin: *invenerunt illum in templo sedentem in medio doctorum, audientem illos, et interrogantem eos* ("they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them, and asking them questions"; Douay-Rheims). This verse simply details in writing all the principal figures depicted in the painting: Jesus, his parents, and the religious teachers.

Along the top of the picture is an abridged quotation from the Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah. This verse gives an edge to the image that the painting does not in and of itself convey: "*Confusi sunt sapientes; perterriti et capti sunt ... et sapientia nulla est in eis*" ("The wise men are confounded, they are dismayed, and taken ... there is no wisdom in them"; Jer 8:9; Douay-Rheims). Here then is a criticism of the Jewish teachers that is missing in canonical Luke, but is reminiscent of the account found in the Inf. Gos. Thom.⁴⁹ There, the boy Jesus

49 An "anti-Jewish" visual tradition of this scene was more prominent in the northern Renaissance. See Jan Bialostocki, "'Opus quinque dierum': Dürer's 'Christ among the doctors' and its sources," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 22 (1959): 17–34, and especially, Margaret D. Carroll, "Dürer's *Christ among the Doctors* Re-Examined," *Shop Talk: Studies in Honor of Seymour Slive* (Cambridge: Harvard University Art Museums, 1995), 49–54, 196–97. Anti-Judaism in the New Testament and especially in the Fourth Gospel has been an on-going concern of Alan Culpepper's, as has Jewish/Christian relations more generally. See, for example, his "The Gospel of John as a Threat to Jewish-Christian Relations," in *Overcoming Fear between Jews and Christians*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 21–43; and "Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel as a Problem for Christian Interpreters," in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel: Papers of the Leuven Colloquium, 2000*, ed. R. Bieringer, D. Pollefeyt, and F. Vandecasteele-Vanneuville (Assen, The Netherlands: Royal Van Gorcum, 2001), 68–91. Recently, he participated in a

reduces the Jewish teachers to silence; here, by virtue of the cited OT verse, Jesus confounds them, and no wisdom is found in them.⁵⁰

Alessandro Allori was born into a family of Florentine painters on May 31, 1535. Agnolo Bronzino, a Florentine Mannerist painter, adopted Alessandro after his father died when he was five years old. This was a strong workshop lineage for the artist as Bronzino had studied with Pontormo.⁵¹ Allori learned the elegance, color palette and complex compositions of *la maniera*, or style of the day, as it was called by Giorgio Vasari. In 1554, at the age of nineteen, Allori traveled to Rome to study contemporary painting as well as antique art and architecture. After this short sojourn in Rome, where he was influenced by Michelangelo's art, Allori returned to Florence. In Florence, Allori worked for the Medici, just as Bronzino had. Allori was appointed director of the Florentine tapestry factory in the mid-1570s. Allori's work, *The Pearl Fishers*, was included in the Studiolo of Francesco I de' Medici in the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence that is today a hidden gem of exemplary Mannerist painting held in high regard by the aristocratic elite of sixteenth-century Florence. Allori's paintings, which display the complicated twisting poses typical of Florentine Mannerism, influenced artistic developments in Tuscany for almost fifty years following his death.⁵²

One of his first commissions when back in Florence was for the Montauto family. Borghini, in *Il Riposo*, listed several portraits of family members (Benedetto, Zanobi, and Ortensia de Montauto as well as her husband Tommaso de' Bardi) painted by Allori while he was still in Rome.⁵³ Borghini stated that it was Tommaso de' Bardi who suggested Allori for the decoration

conference, "The Gospel of John and Jewish-Christian Relations" at Boston College, April 2–3, 2017.

50 For this reason, it may be more appropriate to revise the title, "Jesus among the Doctors," which otherwise has the effect of gliding over the problem of the anti-Jewish slant to the inscription's interpretation, an interpretation, to repeat, that is missing from the Gospel account itself. This point, of course, is not to ignore the contested issue of whether or not Luke/Acts is itself anti-Jewish in other places. For varying views on this, see, *inter alia*, Joseph B. Tyson, ed., *Luke, Judaism, and the Scholars: Critical Approaches to Luke-Acts* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010).

51 Hornik and Parsons, *Illuminating Luke*, 2:118–119.

52 "Alessandro Allori," The Getty Museum (accessed 27 January 2018) <<http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/artists/719/alessandro-allori-italian-1535-1607/>>.

53 Elizabeth Pilliod, *Pontormo, Bronzino, Allori: A Genealogy of Florentine Art* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2001), 148.

of the family chapel in Santissima Annunziata.⁵⁴ The chapel was built in honor of Bastiano Montauto (1488–1552), who made his family fortune in Rome as a banker in the early 1500s. Bastiano survived the Sack of Rome by being imprisoned, but when Clement VII returned to power he benefited from the restored papal banks and continued to thrive under Paul II (Farnese). During his entire stay in Rome, Montauto was a crucial part of the Florentine community in Rome.

Alessandro Allori received the commission to fresco decoration the two side walls of the Montauto Chapel in Santissima Annunziata when he returned to Florence in 1560. (This is the same church that contained Fra Angelico's reliquary silverchest discussed above.) *The Expulsion of the Moneychangers*, on the right wall of the chapel, finds its source in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* fresco in the Sistine Chapel. Allori learned dramatic figural gesture from Michelangelo's painting and his drawings, according to scholar Elizabeth Pilliod.⁵⁵ This was an appropriate scene for a chapel whose patron was a banker.

The fresco on the left wall is the *Christ Among the Doctors* (Fig. 11.3). It is a unique composition that incorporates numerous contemporary Florentine portraits and classical architecture and reverses the pose of Plato from Raphael's *School of Athens* in the Vatican papal apartments for the figure of Jesus.⁵⁶ The multi-figured composition is semicircular with Christ positioned in the center on the steps of the Temple. His left hand gestures towards Heaven for the source of his divine wisdom. Christ is certainly lecturing the doctors in the Temple as his parents have not yet arrived. This is the only painting of the three discussed here that does not depict Mary and Joseph in the composition. Antique sculptures are visible in the architecture, and the drapery colors are typical vibrant, Mannerist colors of yellow, green, and rose. The male figure in the left foreground is painted in the *changeant* style with several colors visible in the material as if light is passing through shot silk. This is the latest of the three Renaissance works and anticipates the dramatic and densely populated compositions of the Italian Baroque in the seventeenth century.

54 Pilliod, *Pontormo, Bronzino, Allori*, 148.

55 Pilliod, *Pontormo, Bronzino, Allori*, 162.

56 Pilliod, *Pontormo, Bronzino, Allori*, 162.



FIGURE 11.3 *Alessandro Allori, Christ Among the Doctors, 1560, Santissima Annunziata, Florence.*

Conclusion

Luke's depiction of the boy Jesus in the Temple has generated considerable interest over the history of interpretation. Literarily, it stands as a transition

between the infancy of Jesus and the beginning of his public ministry. The story is also a canonical example of the subsequent interest in the “hidden life” of Jesus that will preoccupy Christians well into the medieval period and beyond. The story also figures prominently in the triangulated relationship of Jesus to his parents and to his heavenly Father, Jesus’ “two natures” as crystallized in later Christology, and Mary’s developing role as “Mother of God.” Only the first of these issues seems a concern of the Third Evangelist. The interpretation of the story also moves in the direction of heightening Jewish/Christian tensions and, after the parting of the Ways, Christian anti-Judaism, beginning with its re-iteration in the *Inf. Gos. Thom.* and continuing into the visual tradition, as illustrated by the interpretive inscription at the top of the Fra Angelico panel. This brief review of the text’s reception serves, we hope, as a reminder of the benefits of attending to that interpretive history, even when it points in the direction not only of paths to follow, but also of mistakes to avoid.⁵⁷

57 The copyright permissions for this article were supported by an Allbritton Grant for Faculty Scholarship, Department of Art & Art History, Baylor University.

Disability and Dis-ease: Body, Restoration, and Ethics of Reading in Luke's Gospel

John T. Carroll

In a 2001 essay addressing the challenge of anti-Judaism in the interpretation of the Gospel of John, Alan Culpepper emphasized the deep indebtedness of the Johannine narrative to the Jewish heritage even as it also features fierce anti-Jewish polemic. In that essay, Culpepper advocated a reading strategy that “reassert[s] elements of John’s theology that are discordant with its anti-Judaism.”¹ In an earlier essay that also urged an ethically responsible strategy for reading the Fourth Gospel, Culpepper ventured the proposal that this Gospel’s “declaration of God’s boundless love for the world undermines its polemic against ‘the Jews.’”² He urged that “our reading of the Gospel must be informed not only by theological tradition and historical criticism but also by concern for the effects and ethical implications of our interpretation.”³

Culpepper enjoys good company among eminent New Testament scholars who in recent years have made an explicit move to foreground the ethical dimensions of their reading of the text. I will mention just a few other examples here. Attending to the way in which ancient narratives like the book of Acts present characters as moral exemplars (both positive and negative), Robert Tannehill observes that readers “with ethical concerns will evaluate narrative characters ethically. They will view the characters as exemplars of positive or negative ethical action.”⁴ Complex construction of characters and complications in circumstance may require “complex judgments as to what is good and

1 R. Alan Culpepper, “Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel as a Theological Problem for Christian Interpreters,” in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt, and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 61–82 (82).

2 R. Alan Culpepper, “The Gospel of John as a Document of Faith in a Pluralistic Culture,” in *“What is John?”: Readers and Readings of the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia, SBLSymS 3 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 107–27 (127).

3 Culpepper, “Document of Faith,” 126.

4 Robert C. Tannehill, “Do the Ethics of Acts Include the Ethical Teaching in Luke?” in *Acts and Ethics*, ed. Thomas E. Phillips (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), 109–22 (110). Tannehill is building on the work of William S. Kurz, “Narrative Models for Imitation in Luke–Acts,” in

bad in their actions,” so this is no simple matter, even apart from the distance in culture and circumstance that separates contemporary readers from ancient narrative.⁵ Tannehill commends the hermeneutical *option* of reading moral models in the characters of Acts in a way that is continuous with the ethical teaching of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, though the indeterminacy of narrative means that this is not the only way in which Acts may be read.⁶

With particular concern for the ways in which New Testament writings negotiate Roman imperial power, Warren Carter highlights the awareness that is necessary for ethically responsible reading of narratives that might otherwise perpetuate violence. Reading the Bible with discernment, Carter holds, “begins with our awareness that the New Testament writings reinscribe pervasive and sanctioned violence by both human and divine agents,” no surprise “since the New Testament texts do not exist in isolation from the sanctioned violence that pervaded ... the imperial context from which they originated.”⁷ This awareness “is a first step in contemplating and countering how New Testament texts sanction violence and how they might fashion us for the worse as committed readers. Without such awareness, for example, texts that depict disease, hunger, and poverty can be understood to be normative rather than sanctioned structural violence against the poor.”⁸

In the absence of such awareness, “there can be no resistance to texts that sanction violence against people. Such resistance presupposes an interpretive stance that takes reading the Scriptures very seriously so as to be alert to their damaging impact on people’s lives. It employs a strategy of dialogical and evaluative engagement rather than ready consent and submission.”⁹ Carter commends an interpretive approach directed by what is “deemed to be central to the tradition and to represent the tradition at its best. One formulation foregrounds that which is life-giving, loving, and liberating as central affirmations of the tradition at its best and as a framework for its interpretation.”¹⁰

In numerous publications, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has pressed for a rhetorical-ethical interpretive approach that exposes the systems of patriarchy and kyriarchy (domination by “lord/master/father/husband”) inscribed

Greeks, Romans, and Christians, ed. David L. Balch, Everett Ferguson, and Wayne A. Meeks (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 171–89.

5 Tannehill, “Do the Ethics of Acts,” 110.

6 Tannehill, “Do the Ethics of Acts,” 121.

7 Warren Carter, “Sanctioned Violence in the New Testament,” *Int* 71 (2017): 284–97.

8 Carter, “Sanctioned Violence,” 297.

9 Carter, “Sanctioned Violence,” 297.

10 Carter, “Sanctioned Violence,” 297.

in biblical texts in service of contemporary moves toward emancipation.¹¹ By attending to the rhetoric of a text, its social-cultural location, and its diverse interpretations, readers may become aware of “the text’s possible oppressive as well as liberative performative actions, values, and possibilities” in varying contexts of its reception; thus the Bible is “a site of struggle over authority, values, and meaning.”¹²

Stanley Porter, on the other hand, vigorously resists the notion that a reader bears ethical responsibility for “the effects of our interpretation on others,” in part because (in his view) it implies that the interpreter has a capacity for moral responsibility that others affected by the interpretation do not.¹³ The ethical concerns mentioned in the preceding discussion—notably, anti-Judaism, violence, and patriarchy—show the potential for ethically problematic interpretation of biblical narratives and make clear how much is at stake in the way our readings of such texts shape the moral imagination and praxis of contemporary communities, whether for good or harm. I propose, in what follows, to explore a significant aspect of the Gospels’ accounts of Jesus’ ministry that has garnered increasing attention in recent scholarship that views the text through a disability studies lens. What might ethically constructive reading strategies of healing narratives look like? To be sure, as Porter insists, I do not as an interpreter have control over the moral response of my readers. Nevertheless, I am concerned to offer interpretations that are more rather than less likely to foster constructive moves toward respect for human dignity and the flourishing of persons and communities. This is an ethical commitment that is consonant with the larger biblical witness—as Carter puts it, “the tradition at its best.”

A Profile of Healing Narratives in Luke’s Gospel

Before sketching ways in which at least some healing narratives in Luke may be particularly amenable to the sorts of ethical concerns that I am exploring, it will be helpful to profile this narrative’s approach to Jesus’ healing

11 Here with reference to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 36.

12 Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic*, 45.

13 Stanley E. Porter, “The Genre of Acts and the Ethics of Discourse,” in *Acts and Ethics*, ed. Thomas E. Phillips (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), 1–15 (2).

activity.¹⁴ By my count, the Gospel of Luke includes thirteen healing stories and four accounts of the expelling of demons (unclean spirits).¹⁵ In addition, the narrator provides several general summaries that depict healing as a characteristic activity of Jesus.¹⁶ In Luke's second volume, in a snapshot précis of Jesus' Spirit-empowered ministry for Cornelius' household, Peter highlights the benefactions Jesus provided (*euergetōn*: "doing good") by "healing all who were oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10:38 NRSV; cf. 2:22, where Peter's Pentecost speech recalls the "mighty deeds and wonders and signs" that signaled divine validation of Jesus). Acts 10:38 leaves no doubt about the source of Jesus' capacity to heal: "God was with him."

Readers of Luke's narrative discover numerous indicators of a robust interest in human bodies,¹⁷ and in the phenomena of impairment (whether sickness, physical limitation, or demonic control) and healing or restoration—including its social or communal aspects.¹⁸ The narrator frequently accents the severity and stakes of an impairing condition: (1) an *only* child suffers from the condition (7:12; 8:42; 9:38); (2) the impairment affects the presumably stronger, dominant *right* hand (6:6; contrast Mark 3:1; Matt 12:10) or the *right* ear (22:50, again a uniquely Lukan detail); (3) the impairment is of long duration (8:27, 43; 13:11; cf. Acts 3:2; 4:22; 9:33; 14:8); (4) or the condition is severe ("high" fever, 4:38;

14 I am drawing here from research first presented in my essay "Jesus as Healer in Luke-Acts," in *1994 SBL Seminar Papers*, ed. Eugene H. Lovering (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 269–85.

15 Healing stories: 4:38–39; 5:12–14, 17–26; 6:6–11; 7:1–10, 11–17; 8:40–42 + 49–56; 8:43–48; 13:10–17; 14:1–6; 17:11–19; 18:35–43; 22:50–51. (One might add the account of the reversal of the aging Elizabeth's infertility in 1:5–25.) Stories of release from demons: 4:33–37; 8:26–39; 9:37–43; 11:14.

16 Summary notices from the narrator in 4:40–41; 5:15; 6:17–19; 7:21; 8:2; and 9:11; cf. 9:1–2; 10:17. These notices typically pair mention of sickness or impairment/healing and unclean spirits or demons/expulsion; therefore, while readers are prompted to distinguish the two conditions, they are also linked (see 6:18; 7:21; 8:2). This close association of healing and demon-expulsion returns in the retrospective view of Jesus' acts of benefaction in Acts 10:38. Both sickness and oppression by evil spirits represent conditions that run counter to the divine purpose for human flourishing, conditions from which Jesus' mission is intent to "release" persons.

17 Noted by David F. Watson, "Disability in Luke-Acts," in *Disability and the Bible: A Commentary*, ed. Sarah J. Melcher, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Amos Yong (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 384: "Luke cares about bodies."

18 Tutored by the insights and commitments that inform contemporary disability studies, I will employ the term "impairment" for a limiting physical (physiological or medical) condition and "disability" for the social experience that results from an impairment. See, e.g., Jaime Clark-Soles, "Mark and Disability," *Int* 70 (2016): 159–71 (160).

seven demons expelled from Mary Magdalene, 8:2; an army of demons heading for the abyss, 8:26–39; overpowering convulsions, 9:37–43; a slave “close to death,” 7:2; and even death, 7:12; 8:49).

Moreover, there is considerable emphasis on the response to the experience of body-restoration on the part of persons aided by Jesus as well as observers. Commonly, this response takes the form of praise and gratitude. Joining the praise chorus are both the person helped (5:25; 13:13; 17:15–16; 18:43; cf. 8:39) and other witnesses (5:26; 7:16; 18:43; cf. 9:43 [astonishment at the display of God’s greatness or majesty]; 13:17 [rejoicing]), though observers may also react with fear (5:26; 7:16; 8:35, 37) or even hostility (6:11; 13:14). God’s benefaction and power are regularly glimpsed in an act of healing performed by Jesus, but not everyone sees it that way. Indeed, restorative interventions to liberate persons from harmful control by malevolent spirits can be understood in dramatically different ways by characters in the narrative: as indicators of God’s power and dominion (Jesus’ own interpretation of the events: 11:20; cf. 17:20–21; Acts 10:38) or as the result of Jesus’ alliance with evil powers (Luke 11:15).

Attention to the cultural repertoire available to both Luke and the Gospel’s earliest audiences heightens appreciation of the ways in which the Lukan healing stories are working rhetorically. I will point to four such networks of culturally shaped meaning.

Sickness and the Activity of Demons

The vocabulary employed by the Lukan narrator for the phenomena of sickness and impairment is fluid, moving back and forth between language of disease and that of interference in human well-being by demons or unclean spirits. For example, in 4:39 Jesus “rebukes” a fever and it leaves Simon Peter’s mother-in-law; then in 9:42 Jesus “rebukes” the unclean spirit afflicting a boy, resulting in a “cure” (*iasato*, “he healed [the child]”). In 13:10–17, Jesus releases a “daughter of Abraham” from an impairment (bent body) produced by a “spirit of weakness [or sickness]” (v. 11), also framed as her having been bound by Satan for eighteen years (v. 16). Jesus’ intervention is described as an act of healing (*etherapeusen*, v. 14). Summary descriptions by the narrator likewise blend language of sickness/healing and demon possession/liberation (see n. 16 above). As George has suggested, Luke’s assimilation of the language for disease and demonic possession reflects common notions in Greek medical practice of his era.¹⁹ Viewed through the theological lens Luke’s narrative is crafting, the close tie between healing and liberation from demonic oppression intimates that Jesus’ mission brings God’s benefaction—otherwise put,

19 Augustin George, *Études sur l’Oeuvre de Luc* (Paris: Editions Gabalda, 1978), 75.

the intrusion of God's sovereign rule—to persons suffering conditions of impairment that thwart human well-being and flourishing, whether the result of disease, physical incapacity, or the operation of destructive spirit-beings.

Intertextual Shaping of Meaning

One of the ways in which Luke's narrative points through Jesus' acts of healing to the divine character, commitments, and purpose is through intertextual play—allusions, echoes, and story patterns that invoke Israel's scriptures. Jesus' benefactions for persons afflicted by sickness and disability recall the paradigm of God's mighty prophet. The restoration of life to the only son of a widow at Nain echoes Elijah's resuscitation of the son of a widow at Zarephath (Luke 7:11–17; 1 Kgs 17:17–24) and prompts observers to discern God's visitation through the presence of a mighty prophet (Luke 7:16). While the details vary considerably, Jesus' healing of a Roman army centurion's slave (7:1–10) may call to mind the prophet Elisha's healing intervention at the request of the Syrian military commander Naaman (2 Kgs 5)—an episode already mentioned by Jesus in his inaugural mission statement and defense at Nazareth (Luke 4:16–30; see v. 27). That mission declaration placed at the center of Jesus' vocation as God's Spirit-anointed and divinely empowered prophet-Messiah the embodiment of God's care in hope-engendering, capacity-restoring acts of healing and liberation from oppression (4:18–19). Jesus heals as the agent of God, who wills human well-being and flourishing—a connection articulated by the demon-tormented man whom Jesus frees for a new role as evangelist. God's benefaction comes precisely through Jesus' intervention (8:39).

Invoking—and Subverting—Physiognomic Conventions

As both Mikeal Parsons and Chad Hartsock have shown, Luke engages the common practice in Greco-Roman culture of forming judgments about human character on the basis of perceived physical attributes.²⁰ So, for example, a person afflicted with dropsy (insatiable thirst coupled with abnormal

20 Mikeal C. Parsons, *Body and Character in Luke and Acts: The Subversion of Physiognomy in Early Christianity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011); Chad Hartsock, *Sight and Blindness in Luke-Acts: The Use of Physical Features in Characterization*, BIS 94 (Leiden: Brill, 2008). Surviving handbooks on physiognomy appeared in the third century BCE (Pseudo-Aristotle's *Physiognomonica*) and later, notably Polemo of Laodicea's *On Physiognomy* (early second century CE) and, in the fourth century CE, popularizing updates of Polemo's handbook (Admantius and the anonymous *Latin On Physiognomy*). But the practice of reading character from body appearance was, Hartsock observes, "pervasive in the ancient world" (Hartsock, *Sight and Blindness in Luke-Acts*, 12; similarly Parsons, *Body and Character*, 36), as seen in writings of Aristotle, Cicero, Suetonius, Galen,

fluid retention) was assumed to be avaricious (note Luke 14:1–6);²¹ an unusually short man was also “small in spirit” or “small-minded,” the target of ridicule (note Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1–10);²² a “lame” person with weak ankles or feet was morally weak, timid, cowardly (note Luke 5:19–26; Acts 3:1–10);²³ and someone without ability to see was perceived as helpless, dependent on others, and ignorant (note 18:35–43).²⁴

If Luke's earliest audiences would initially be inclined to assume moral deficit in persons afflicted with such impairments, the narrative steers readers toward a more generous assessment of character. In play are not moral flaws in the one who is sick or disabled (in religious terms: sins) but the persistent, potent activity of evil forces that seek to undermine human well-being. Perhaps the clearest example of this reframing of an impairment is Jesus' freeing of the bent woman from Satan's oppressive power (13:16). Her condition is emphatically *not* the result of a deficit in character. She is rather a woman of dignity and honor as a daughter of Abraham (v. 16). The wealthy chief tax collector Zacchaeus, after his own encounter with Jesus (19:1–10), may remain as short as ever (an impairment of sorts, especially when a large crowd obstructs his vision!), but his virtue is on full display at the close of the scene, with a generous commitment to right wrongs and share wealth freely with the poor (v. 8). A true son of Abraham, as well (v. 9).

Moreover, a man with visual impairment (*typhlos*, “blind man”) seems to confirm initial impressions of deficient character (helpless dependency as a beggar, ignorance, etc.), but as the story unfolds he proves remarkably perceptive (he calls out to Jesus as the son of David, who can extend mercy to him), persistent and assertive (overcoming the crowd's resistance), and ready to assume a faithful disciple's posture, glorifying God and following Jesus (18:35–43). Again and again, Luke makes contact with cultural assumptions that infer moral character from physical appearance, but not so as to endorse them—instead, to challenge and undermine them. This rhetorical interest of Luke's narrative is of a piece with a larger concern for boundary-transgressing social integration and inclusion.

and countless others. Parsons provides a helpful, concise survey (*Body and Character*, 17–37).

21 E.g., Polybius, *Histories* 13.2.2; see John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 296–97.

22 E.g., Pseudo-Aristotle, *Physiognomonica* 808 a 30; Cicero, *De oratore* 2.60.245. See Parsons, *Body and Character*, 98–104.

23 Parsons, *Body and Character*, 110–13.

24 See Hartsock, *Sight and Blindness in Luke-Acts*, 64–81.

Communal Boundaries and Social Integration

Jesus' ministry-inaugurating declaration of mission in his hometown synagogue, which provokes rageful resistance among the people of Nazareth, makes clear from the outset that the vocation of healing and release/liberation to which he is committed as a Spirit-empowered agent of God is to be one that challenges conventional social boundaries and includes persons who find themselves on or beyond the margins of the community. Implicitly accepting the label of physician (4:23; cf. 5:31–32), Jesus will not simply tend to the health of his in-group (4:23–24). Indeed, he hints that like Elijah and Elisha he will privilege *outsiders* who need help (vv. 25–27). As his mission proceeds, he restores health to a Roman army officer's slave (7:1–10), commenting that he has not witnessed healing-seeking faith like this Gentile soldier's even within Israel (v. 9). And he helps ten men afflicted with *lepra*, a skin (body-boundary) malady producing a contagious ritual impurity (17:11–19). After he dispatches them to the priests who have authority to certify the men's restoration (to health, hence to full participation in the community), one of the ten, realizing he has been healed, returns to thank Jesus—and praise God. It turns out—a detail withheld until now by the narrator—that he is a Samaritan, a “foreigner,” as Jesus labels him (v. 18).

These acts of healing by Jesus reinforce what his choice of meal companions and his parabolic teaching also consistently communicate: outsiders are welcomed and step inside, while insiders object and put their own position of privilege at risk.²⁵ The book of Acts will extend this ministry of healing to Jews who experience impairment (e.g., Acts 3:1–10), and eventually to Gentiles as well (e.g., 14:8–10; 19:11–12). The restoration of bodies in Luke (and Acts) is also a restoration to—and a restoration of—community.

From Impairment to Empowerment: Ethical Interests in Reading Luke's Healing Stories

A number of the Lukan narrative's rhetorical concerns and theological commitments highlighted in the preceding section intersect with concerns and commitments evident in contemporary disability studies. When I frame an interpretive approach to Luke's healing narratives that is informed by this recent work, several elements contribute to a proposal for an ethically constructive

25 On this horizontal-reversal pattern, so prominent in Luke's narrative, see Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, 10–11.

reading strategy. In the space available here, I will identify four ethical concerns, for each making contact with healing stories in Luke's Gospel.

Personal Agency and Initiative

While it is apparent that stories featuring Jesus as healer are in large measure testimonies to his identity, role, and vocation as the divinely authorized, Spirit-empowered prophet and Messiah (i.e., they score christological points), at least some of the characters who seek his intervention are not mere props by which the storyteller can display Jesus' power. In several of the healing scenes, in fact, characters with illness or other impairment exhibit agency, initiative, and assertiveness. For example, a Gerasene man, freed by Jesus from the destructive force of a demon army ("Legion"), becomes a vocal witness to the healing power of God-through-Jesus in his village (8:38–39). In the very next scene, a woman boldly approaches Jesus and takes the initiative, surreptitiously, to touch his garment—and her twelve-year flow of blood ceases when her touch draws healing energy out of him (8:43–48). Later, as Jesus travels through a liminal space "between Samaria and Galilee" (17:11), a man from Samaria afflicted with a skin disease opts not to proceed to a priest, as directed by Jesus, but instead returns to Jesus to express thanks and praise to God—praiseworthy response to healing by none other than a "foreigner" (17:15–18). A man who is blind and seemingly helpless, resorting to begging by the roadside outside Jericho, persists in calling out to the son of David, names his desire for sight, and then follows Jesus as he continues his journey toward Jerusalem (18:35–43). Moreover, although Luke does not narrate the events, several women liberated by Jesus from demons model generous sharing of possessions as they fund his itinerant mission (8:1–3). Repeatedly, characters whose bodies carry various kinds of impairment exhibit agency and initiative.

Faith and Flourishing

Often, the agency, the initiative, displayed by characters seeking healing in Luke's Gospel takes the form of an approach to the healer motivated by *pistis*—confident, hopeful faith. Three times an episode concludes with Jesus pronouncing that health—wholeness or deliverance—has resulted from the *pistis* of the petitioner. In 7:48–50 a woman impaired by her reputation as sinner receives restoration in the form of forgiveness, after her bold approach to Jesus at a Pharisee's banquet, and her lavish expression of devotion and gratitude to Jesus. In 8:43–48 a woman plagued by a chronic bleeding ailment receives restoration in the form of the spontaneous cessation of bleeding, after her bold approach to Jesus. And in 18:42 a man with a visual impairment and reduced to a life of begging receives restoration in the form of capacity to

see, after his persistent, crowd-overcoming, confident appeal to “Jesus, son of David” (vv. 38–39). When Jesus asks the man what he wants, he replies, “That I may see [again]” (v. 41, my trans.; the verb is *anablepsō*). Jesus responds with the imperative verb *anablepson* (“See [again]!”) and then adds, “Your faith has saved you/made you well” (v. 42). The phrasing accents the man’s agency in his own restoration.

In these three scenes featuring the faith that moves persons toward well-being and flourishing, the need varies, from public perception of moral failure to medical condition and physical impairment, along with the accompanying social disabilities. The refrain, however, is consistent: “Your faith has saved [*sesōken*] you; go in peace.”

Readers in the twenty-first century would do well to challenge any equation of “being saved” with the cure of a medical condition or the removal of an impairment—hence also to resist the formula “faith produces healing.” For despite the impressive success stories of the Gospel healing narratives, in our own experience a cure may not follow from a faithful life and trusting prayer, and an impairment may remain in full effect. (Indeed, we may find ourselves in the company of the disciples at the base of the mount of transfiguration in their experience of frustration and failure as healers, in Jesus’ absence [9:40].) The meaning of restored health and wholeness may need to be rethought in view of the experience of such persons.

Social Integration

The narrative Luke crafts, as we have seen, accents hospitality toward—social integration of—persons with physical and resource limitations, as well as perceived moral deficits. More than once, Jesus names as the primary thrust of his mission the restoration of persons on the outside and underside of society—the “sinful” and the “lost”—to a place of honor within the community (5:32; 19:10; implicitly in the three parables of ch. 15). Bent woman, Zacchaeus, and all the rest: true daughters and sons of Abraham (13:16; 19:9; cf. 16:22–23).

Moves toward social integration, whether imaged as incorporation into the quasi-family of Jesus’ disciples (as in the case of the women benefactors of 8:1–3) or as a restoration to village social networks (as in the case of the Gerasene man freed of a demon army in 8:26–39 and Jairus’ daughter in 8:49–56), may entail a reversal of a situation of social marginalization and isolation. No more dramatic an illustration of this transformation can be offered than the tomb-dwelling man tormented by a demonic Legion. But the reversal of circumstance, from isolation to a place within the community, is evident in other stories as well, including the men cleansed of a leprous skin disease

(17:11–19), the bleeding woman whose isolation cannot be masked by the large crowd from which she separates herself to touch Jesus' garment (8:43–48), and the man whose sight is restored and who moves from roadside begging to the disciple's posture of following Jesus (18:35–43).

Advocacy

It is crucial to affirm the dignity of persons with conditions of impairment, challenging and countering common social practices where necessary. Again here we may follow—and press beyond—Luke's cues to readers to resist inferences regarding character, intelligence, and capability from physical features such as appearance and impairment. We may not only extend generous welcome into our social spaces but also advocate vigorously for policies, practices, and institutional structures that extend access to resources and promote opportunities for persons with impairment to contribute meaningfully to the public good.

Luke's narrative offers several examples of advocacy for persons with disease or disability. There are the paralyzed man's faithful, roof-and-crowd-scorning friends, who go to great lengths to bring him to Jesus (5:18–19: it is *their* faith that wins his attention [v. 20]). There is the centurion, petitioner on behalf of his ill slave, and he too has his admiring advocates among Jewish community leaders (7:3–8). And there are parents insistently appealing to Jesus on behalf of their children: the only daughter of a member of the social elite (8:41–42) and the demon-tormented only son of a desperate father (9:38–40). Especially intriguing is the subtly shifting role of the crowd in Jesus' encounter with a blind man near Jericho. At first a hindrance obstructing his quest for sight (18:39), it becomes at Jesus' directive a healer's assistant, ushering the man to Jesus (v. 40). Persons who must deal with life-limiting impairments and life-threatening medical conditions need advocates, supporters, and friends like these.

Probing Two Stories of Healing and Liberation (Luke 8:26–39; 13:10–17)

Space permits only brief discussion of two stories of “release” from an impairment—an expelling of demons and a removal of a disabling physical condition—to illustrate the way in which a reading strategy responsive to the ethical concerns outlined in the preceding sections of the essay might proceed.

*From Tombstone Isolation to Mission Summons: A Story of
Liberation (Luke 8:26–39)*

The narrator depicts an extreme situation, replete with a demon army controlling a Gerasene man, who as a result is uncontrollable, naked, and has taken up residence among the tombs—isolated from human company, experiencing ongoing social death among the literally dead (8:27, 29).²⁶ As the scene opens, the man exhibits a measure of agency, but not because he is seeking Jesus' intervention. Rather, with spirit-realm insight into Jesus' holy identity as divine son, he attempts unsuccessfully to push Jesus away (v. 28). As the exchange proceeds, however, it becomes clear that it is the legion of demons that is in charge. The man begs Jesus not to "torment *me*" (v. 28, my ital.) and discloses his name as Legion (v. 30), but what ensues is a negotiation between Jesus and the demons themselves, culminating, ironically, in their demise—they avoid the abyss by leading a herd of pigs over a cliff (vv. 31–33).

What follows this scene of chaos and destruction is the man's restoration to serenity: now clothed, he sits at Jesus' feet in the posture of learner, a sight that ironically evokes terror in observers (v. 35), who are informed that the man has been "healed" (v. 36). Fear leads these people to drive Jesus away, and the man seeks to accompany him (vv. 37–38). But Jesus needs an evangelist to remain in this region, as he departs, so he dispatches the healed man as "apostle" to his home: "'Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.' So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him" (v. 39). Out of a circumstance of extreme isolation and disability emerges equipping for mission, and reintegration into a social network ("home").

With Jesus' forced departure and with the man's fellow villagers, in their last description, remaining fearful, the rehabilitated man of many demons will need to be his own advocate. The concluding coda of the composition suggests that despite the prospect of resistance to this substantial change in the village's social system, he will perform his new role well, as he centers his speech-making on the generous benefaction of Jesus, through whom God has liberated and now empowered him.

*A Woman Gets Straight—and Jesus Sets His Critics Straight
(Luke 13:10–17)*

In 13:10–17, Jesus for a second time encounters a person with a physical impairment while in a synagogue on the sabbath. As in 6:6–11 (the healing of a man with a withered right hand), the woman in need in this scene has no voice and

26 On the sociological concept of social death, see the articles addressing "Social Death" in the themed issue: *Contemporary Social Science: Journal of the Academy of Social Sciences* 10.3 (2015).

takes no initiative, apart from her presence in the assembly. The fact of her presence does mean that the woman with bent back is not socially isolated, though her character has little agency in the episode—that is, until Jesus has spoken the word of her release and placed his hands on her (13:12–13). Then she stands straight and finds her voice, praising God.

The circumstance of the woman with bent back, together with Jesus' intervention to aid her on the sabbath, provides the provocation that once again draws conflicting interpretations of the sabbath command into the foreground. In this regard, the healing/conflict story reprises the story of 6:6–11. It also anticipates a third sabbath healing yet to come, one that again surfaces divergent understandings of fidelity to the Torah's sabbath command, this time fittingly set at a banquet in the home of a sparring partner of Jesus, a Pharisee (14:1–6). The theme sounds with variations in these scenes in which healing sparks debate, but the point Luke is scoring is difficult to miss: Jesus' sabbath praxis, in which his ministry of release takes no days off, is consonant with scripture. The Torah's sabbath command, rightly understood and enacted, fosters human well-being and flourishing.

The arrival of the woman with bent back in the synagogue is evidently not problematic in itself, except that the assembly's presiding officer, after the healing word and touch from Jesus, ascribes to her what he regards as an objectionable motive. She showed up just to seek a sabbath-day healing: "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day" (13:14). The woman has no advocates here—not, that is, until Jesus stands with her, and so she stands straight too, after eighteen long years bent over. Despite the synagogue leader's assumption that she came simply to be healed, the narrator gives the initiative in the event solely to Jesus. He notices her, and acts without a word or gesture from her appealing for help (v. 12; in contrast, e.g., to the man with visual impairment, whom Jesus asks what he wishes to gain from him [18:41]).

Although included within the synagogue company, the woman is nevertheless more scorned than welcomed, at least in the presider's reaction to the event of healing. But Jesus affirms her dignity as a member of the people of Abraham. Her status as "daughter of Abraham" made her worthy of his benefaction, and so preceded the removal of her impairment: "[O]ught not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" (v. 16). Overcoming the protests of Jesus' adversaries (now plural, not just the synagogue leader), the crowd is joyful (v. 17). Their reaction reinforces Jesus' move to draw the woman into the center of the community—social (re)integration like that later undertaken by Jesus on behalf of another of Abraham's disdained children, Zacchaeus (19:7, 9).

When Jesus frames the woman's physical impairment as the imposition by an evil power of an unwelcome, oppressing constraint (bound by Satan for eighteen years, 13:16; cf. "spirit of weakness" as the external source of her condition in v. 11), he signals unambiguously that her impairment has not resulted from any moral deficit (or sin) on her part. This affirmation reinforces a point already scored in 13:1–5: people suffer misfortune without deserving it. Disaster—or disability—happens, and not because of the sinfulness of the one who suffers from it. This story of liberation from an oppressing condition thus serves as a corrective to any inference from the healing story in 5:19–26 that impairment is the consequence of one's sin. The interpretation of the woman's bent back as the work of demonic power cuts another way, though, and this too needs mention. I would argue that it is problematic, both psychologically and theologically, to "explain" physical impairment—which may indeed be an important dimension not only of a person's experience but also of her identity—as the product of an evil power's interference. Jesus' mission praxis, on the sabbath as on every other day, indicates that the divine purpose has as a central concern human well-being and flourishing. That well-being and flourishing, however, may incorporate rather than jettison a condition of impairment, especially when the dignity of the person with the impairment is honored and she or he is fully and meaningfully integrated into human community.

Concluding (Personal and, of Course, Unscientific) Postscript

My interest in this topic has grown as, with my siblings, I have had to come to terms with the decline, frailty, and eventually severely disabling dementia of my mother, who died in October 2016 at 96. For nearly all her life a woman of intelligence, tenacious strength, resolve, commitment, and deep faith, she became weaker and increasingly impaired cognitively. What do the Gospel portraits of Jesus as healer mean in light of this now very common reality? A provocative essay by Beverly Gaventa prodded me to deep reflection on this experience.²⁷ What does Paul's theology look like when we take into account a variety of limitations on human capacity—such as first-century slaves' lack of control over their own bodies and (engaging the work of John Swinton) cognitive impairment of a contemporary person with severe dementia?²⁸ Can we conceive of God's gracious provision of salvation even in such circumstances

27 Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "Which Humans? What Response? A Reflection on Pauline Theology," *Ex Auditu* 30 (2014): 50–64.

28 John Swinton, *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

of impairment? Does God's grace depend on human capacity? Gaventa answers in the negative—it is about God's character and expansive grace, not human capability.

I propose an interpretive approach to the healing narratives of Luke's Gospel that presses similar concerns. These stories, along with other activities of Jesus (especially his meal praxis and his parabolic teaching), witness to the expansive grace of God as Jesus embraces—touches with redemptive power—persons in many and various conditions of impairment and need. We cannot—and need not attempt to—duplicate the success of Jesus as healer. But we can carry on in ways available to us:

- affirming and honoring the dignity—not defined by productive capacity—of persons who experience disabling dis-ease and impairment;
- but at the same time affirming the agency of persons who have limiting conditions, not depriving them of the opportunity to be productive vocationally and as participants in mission within the constraints defined by their condition;
- extending welcome into a supporting, nurturing community;
- forming, fostering, and sustaining communities whose practices embody these values, communities enriched by the presence of persons with various conditions of impairment.

I would like to imagine that at the Lukan table feast emblematic of the dominion of God (e.g., 14:15–24; 22:14–18), all sorts of people and bodies will be welcome, just as they are. There will be persons of robust faith and tenacious strength who are paraplegic. And there will be persons of insight, creativity, and courage whose vision or hearing is impaired. There will be persons once intelligent and articulate who now have extreme cognitive limitation, so that they cannot join the chorus in praise of God. There will be persons who struggle with depression or anxiety disorder. And there will be persons who are fighting cancer. They too will all find welcome and loving embrace, just as they are. Their place—in the first or the twenty-first century—depends not on what they are able to offer but on the one who welcomes them. I don't presume to claim that Luke's narrative takes us as far as an ethically constructive reading for the twenty-first century needs to go, but I dare to think that it points us down this path.

It is a genuine honor to offer this modest study in grateful tribute to Alan Culpepper, whose superb scholarship has richly contributed to the flourishing of so many persons and communities. May his distinctly Luke-like tribe increase!

The Parable of the Minas in Lukan Context: Jesus and Kingship, the Carnavalesque, and Intertextuality

Robert L. Brawley

In its reception history, a humanely insensitive construal has dominated conventional interpretations of the parable of the Minas (Luke 19:11–27). In modern research three methodological approaches to the parable have governed this callous (mis)understanding: (1) the predilection to read the parable in its Lukan context as an allegory, (2) the desire to discover a virtue as the “lesson” of the parable in this allegorical form, and (3) the extraction of the parable from its context in order presumably to recover the voice of Jesus rather than that of the evangelist. Take the classic example of Joachim Jeremias who argues that Luke used the parable to refute false expectations of an imminent parousia and to inculcate the virtue of responsibility, and accordingly that Luke made the risen and absent Jesus comparable to the throne pretender.¹ Although David Lull focuses his argument on Luke 22:25, he proposes that Luke portrayed kings in general to be “ideal benefactors,”² a perspective that squares with allegorizing the king in the parable of the Minas as a stand-in for Jesus.

Things are scarcely any different in Arnold Hultgren’s commentary at the beginning of the twenty-first century.³ He takes the parable in its Lukan context to be an allegory of Jesus’ ascension and parousia, which corrects erroneous views of an imminent arrival of God’s βασιλεία,⁴ emphasizes the responsibility of Jesus’ disciples, and depicts judgment upon those who reject Jesus.

In my view, such readings bypass dimensions of the parable that are inhumane. In order to get to the “virtue” of the relationship of diligence that disciples supposedly have with the Messiah until the parousia, interpreters simply overlook the appalling institution of slavery as well as the characterization of

1 Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (New York: Scribner’s, 1972), 59–61.

2 David Lull, “The Servant-Benefactor as a Model of Greatness (Luke 22:24–30),” *NovT* 18 (1986): 289–305.

3 Arnold Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 284–89.

4 I leave βασιλεία untranslated because I consider typical contemporary political concepts of “kingdom” to be misleading.

the throne pretender as a severe exploiter of others who profits from what he does not invest and harvests what he does not plant (19:21, 22).⁵ In his magisterial commentary, Klyne Snodgrass also overlooks the injustices of slavery and Roman imperialism. Rather, he understands the throne seeker's motivation for his slaves to make a profit simply to be appropriate. Thus, his demand that the slaves do business with his money excludes the possibility that the throne seeker is a rogue, so that he suitably corresponds to Jesus.⁶ Further, this view makes Jesus in his judgment at the parousia analogous to the king who upon his return brutally executes his enemies (19:27).⁷

Granted, earlier Bernard Scott attempted to take an edge off of the harshness of the king by posing that the parable gives readers/hearers two images of his relationships with the slaves. He portrays the master not as the hardhearted king that the third slave presumes, but a gracious and generous ruler who rewards the first two slaves.⁸ The major problem with this is that not only does the third slave, with whom peasant hearers would likely identify, characterize his master as a ruthless exploiter, the master himself unequivocally agrees (19:22). I dissent further from Scott's notion that the king is gracious and generous with the first two slaves. When he rewards them with minas and oversight of cities (19:17–19), he is cementing their loyalty in patron/client relationships.⁹ Indeed, setting these two slaves over cities reflects a common imperial strategy to make local rulers collaborators who maintain order and steer tribute toward Rome. Thus, the king's bestowal of power on these slaves assures that they will be loyal to him as local collaborators in regional imperial systems. But for Scott, Luke still employs the parable as a metaphorical representation of ascension, parousia, and judgment, with which at its heart the parable teaches the virtue of diligence. Further, for him the most authentic function of the parable lies not in Luke's use of it but in its retrojection into the context of Jesus' earthly ministry.

5 For a similar charge of callous disregard of the oppressed embedded in this "traditionalist" interpretation see Adam Braun, "An Abject Kingdom: Reversal, Disruption, and the Minas (19:11–28) in Lukan Narrative Perspectives" (Ph.D. diss., Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, IL, 2016), 203.

6 Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 532, 539.

7 Snodgrass (*Stories with Intent*, 540) dismisses the inhumane horror of the throne seeker's slaughter of his enemies by transforming it into a *parabolic* warning of judgment.

8 Bernard Scott, *Hear then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 234.

9 This demonstrates that the purpose of charging interest is to gain power over others (Ekkehard Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of the First Century*, trans. O. C. Dean [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999], 17–18).

Hierarchies of Dominance

It is not irrelevant to note that this standard interpretation flourished in elite western circles where hierarchies of dominance were accepted as normal—men over women, educated over uneducated, northern hemisphere over southern, wealth sufficient to provide opportunities for moderately elite scholars to be full-time academics over scarcity that requires full-time labor of peasants to maintain subsistence, urban over rural, etc. As Pierre Bourdieu so accurately demonstrates, such hierarchies of dominance are grounded in cultural presuppositions that are ingrained by a socialization that is overdetermined by multifaceted structures—family, peers, education, religion, popular culture, economic systems, ethnicity, occupation, gender relationships, geographical location, food, clothing, etc.¹⁰ These presuppositions are so ingrained that they appear to be natural, literally “common sense.” That is, they are true to constructs of reality that everyone in the culture holds “in common.” In fact, when sub-dominants such as the three slaves in the parable participate in hierarchical systems, whether by compliance or resistance, they make a concession to the system by merely taking part in it.¹¹

The parable of the Minas reflects such hierarchies of dominance that were grounded on presuppositions that were accepted as normal: ruler over ruled, master over slave, and a growing economy over stable subsistence. In fact, one tell-tale clue is that if the third slave’s characterization of the king/master as a ruthless exploiter in an extractive economy had come from a social equal, it would be a challenge *against* his honor. But the elite who are dominant set the criteria of honor and shame, and so when the negative evaluation comes from a *slave*, the king/master accepts it with no pangs of conscience. Indeed, he uses it as a claim to honor in his status as king. In so many words, when dominant elites dominate, they do what cultural presuppositions expect of them, and thus the domination over sub-dominants is itself taken to be a sign of honor that demonstrates their dominant status. To reiterate, the conventional interpretation of the parable simply passes over the heartless institution of slavery, along with the appalling behavior of the king/master who exploits his slaves and executes his enemies before his eyes. Astoundingly, these injustices have provided few obstacles for interpreters to take the king as a metaphorical type of none other than Jesus.

10 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard, 1984), 100–65.

11 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 165.

The Parable of Minas as Parody

Richard Rohrbaugh makes an important contribution to the interpretation of this parable by demonstrating that the accumulation of wealth in a limited goods society would be viewed by peasants as nothing less than immoral because the accumulation of wealth by one person deprives others of resources.¹² He underscores this point by showing that the similar parable in the Gospel of the Nazoreans (available only in a quotation from Eusebius) censures a servant *who earns interest* on his master's money and commends one who *safeguarded* what was entrusted to him.¹³ Indeed, this strategy ranks high in the norms of peasants.¹⁴ Still Rohrbaugh assumes that Luke allegorized the parable, so that he focuses instead on what the parable would have meant for a peasant hearer in Jesus' ministry.

Like Rohrbaugh, and virtually simultaneously, William Herzog proposes reading the parable not from the perspective of the dominant elite but of sub-dominant peasants, a status that would include the slaves. From this point of view, the third slave is a "whistle-blower" who unmasks the exploitation of the king.¹⁵ But in order to do this Herzog also follows the conventional methodology of interpreting the parable not on the level of Luke but on the level of the historical Jesus.

Alan Culpepper broke through this conventional allegorical interpretation with his commentary on Luke in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, when he proposed that the parable should be read in its Lukan context as a parody of Jesus' understanding of the kingdom of God. Jesus' coming as a king (19:38) inverts the image of a rapacious king in Roman political systems who operates on the basis of reward and punishment.¹⁶ In a similar vein, Luise Schottroff perceptively concludes that *Luke's audience* would likewise understand the story as a shocking case that "describes the economic and political structure of an exploitative kingship."¹⁷ As I soon intend to show, in Luke 22:25–26, political kingships in this world are not to be understood as the model for God's βασιλεία; neither is

12 Richard Rohrbaugh, "A Peasant Reading of the Parable of the Talents/Pounds: A Text of Terror?" *BTB* 23 (1993): 32–39, 34–35.

13 Rohrbaugh, "Peasant Reading," 36–37.

14 Stegemann and Stegemann, *Jesus Movement*, 17–18.

15 William Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 150–68.

16 R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," in vol. 9 of *The New Interpreters Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 361–64.

17 Luise Schottroff, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. Linda Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 185.

the Messiah's kingship to be made comparable to the earthly king who is depicted in the parable of the Minas.

I turn to two particular developments from Culpepper's solution of the parable as parody. First, Richard Vinson contributed an article in a volume of *Perspectives in Religious Studies* that commemorated Culpepper, in which Vinson gives a strong background for how this parody functions in the Lukan context of overly zealous eschatological expectations.¹⁸ He moves away from concerns about chronology and eschatology to an indication of the kind of king who comes in God's βασιλεία in stark contrast to the king of the parable. For example, this king expects his slaves to invest anticipating usury, whereas in the Sermon on the Plain Jesus exhorts lending without expecting anything in return (6:34–35).¹⁹ At this point it is easy to make the observation that Vinson does not take Luke's version of the parable as allegory, does not reduce the impact of the parable to a lesson in a virtue (such as diligent fidelity), and interprets the parable in its Lukan context without tracing it back to the earthly Jesus.

Second, Adam Braun has followed the lead of Culpepper and Vinson. He also eschews allegory, does not focus on an implicit emphasis on a virtue, and interprets the parable in its Lukan context.²⁰ In keeping with this Lukan context, Braun emphasizes the way the parable highlights the dynamics of an extractive economy in light of similar factors in the Lukan context. In fact, he describes the fundamental economic condition of the populace at large as "abject."²¹ Further, he follows Luke's narrative context beyond the parable through the crucifixion and astutely observes that Jesus dies like the enemies of the nobleman in the parable, that is, he is executed as an antagonistic victim of noblemen, namely, Herod and Pilate.²²

In contrast to Lull, Vinson and Braun both emphasize persistent negative characterizations of kings in Luke-Acts. Both claim that Jesus does not function as a king, and ascriptions to him as a king, such as his disciples' acclamation

18 Richard Vinson, "The Minas Touch: Anti-Kingship Rhetoric in the Gospel of Luke," *PRSt* 35 (2008): 69–86. See Vinson's closely related treatment in *Luke*, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary (Mercer, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2008), 593–99.

19 Vinson, "Minas," 76.

20 Adam Braun, "Reframing the Parable of the Pounds in Lukan Narrative and Economic Context," *CurTM* 39 (2012): 442–48.

21 Braun, "Abject Kingdom," 1–2 and passim. Braun derives his understanding of "abject" as "cast off" from Julia Kristeva who developed it from her psychoanalytic reflections on what infants reject in their early months when they realize that a reality exists apart from them that does not serve them.

22 Braun, "Reframing," 447–48.

at the triumphal entry (19:38), reflect their false categorization of him just like Pilate's *titulus* on the cross.²³ On the other hand, Vinson does recognize that the way in which Jesus is associated with God's βασιλεία, the way in which he overcomes powers of evil, and the way in which the poor benefit from collective benevolences among his disciples indicate that he does play a role that anticipates his reign after his resurrection and ascension on the throne of David.²⁴

Although I evaluate the insights of both Vinson and Braun positively, I wish to add two additional aspects of figuration in Luke's language. They both speak of parody, and Vinson particularly associates parody with irony. In my opinion, however, the function of irony is inadequately considered, a deficiency that I hope to amend. But then I add two further features of figuration: the carnivalesque and intertextuality.

Irony, the Carnavalesque, and Intertextuality

Irony is a product of deficiency in knowledge. It appears at the interface of a superior level of knowledge with a deficiency at another level. Thus, it exposes an incongruity between two constructs of reality, one incompatibly superior to the other.²⁵ That Luke knew and used irony is beyond dispute. When in his internal monologue Simon the Pharisee says, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who touches him" (Luke 7:39), he sets himself up to be a victim of irony. On a superior level the episode demonstrates that Jesus perceives what Simon's condition contrary to fact denies. Jesus actually does know who and what sort of woman touches him in a way that far surpasses what Simon knows. Or when the two on the road to Emmaus treat Jesus as a stranger who is ignorant of events that have occurred in Jerusalem, they are victims of irony in that his knowledge of what happened is exceedingly superior to theirs (24:13–32).

Gabriel's annunciation to Mary in Luke 1:31–33 provides readers/hearers a level of the narrator's omniscience²⁶ about the destiny of Mary's son as a ruler on the throne of David that exceeds what actors in the story know. What readers/hearers do not yet know is the manner by which this rule develops in Luke's narrative. Vinson understands this to the degree that he proposes that

23 See also Vinson, *Luke*, 37 and passim.

24 Vinson, "Minas," 83–85.

25 Wayne Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 10.

26 Not to be confused with knowledge of everything, an omniscient narrator knows everything that is necessary to tell the story the way it is told.

the enthronement of Jesus occurs with the resurrection and ascension, which is clearly expressed in Peter's comments in Acts 2:29–36: "God has made him both Lord and Messiah."²⁷ Both Vinson and Braun take the ignorance of every character who understands Jesus' kingship in the sense of Israel's political restoration to mean that Luke does not depict the earthly Jesus as a ruler on the throne of David. What is missing in this construal is that readers/hearers of Luke possess a superior level of knowledge that constantly renders every deficient construct of Jesus' kingship ironic.

To speak of the carnivalesque is to refer to a literary feature.²⁸ Nevertheless, its characteristics are easily associated with carnival; namely, the inversion of hierarchy and the reduction of culturally established values to absurdity. Carnival developed from agrarian societies in which there were festive occasions in spring to invoke fertility or in the fall to celebrate the vintage or at the winter solstice when the lengthening of daylight was cause for reveling. The evidence for carnival festivities is widespread both geographically and chronologically. Cases around the Mediterranean include the saturnalia, matronalia, the Syrian cult of Attis, and the Sacian feast of the Persians. Ancient Egypt set apart a period of five days at the end of the year in order to adjust lunar and solar calendars, and this phase that belonged to neither calendar was a time of indulgence and social inversion.²⁹ Especially in harvest festivals the rigors of long and structured labor gave way to play and disorder. To refer to "common sense" again, the age-old phenomenon of carnival sets apart a short, specified period of time to festivities that suspend "common constructs" of social order by inverting norms, reversing inside and outside, overturning top and bottom. Social status is reduced to farce; bodily decorum is flouted. Emphatically, carnival celebrations themselves are not the focus of the carnivalesque as a literary feature, and the brief references here serve only to point to the shared characteristics of inversion and reduction to absurdity.

Whereas Bakhtin included parody in the carnivalesque,³⁰ Julia Kristeva drew a distinction between the two figurations because of differences in the

27 Vinson, "Minas," 79, 81.

28 Identified especially by Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Carol Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 107–8, 122–35; and Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 78–85.

29 James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, part 6 (London: Macmillan, 1913), 338–41.

30 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 127.

seriousness of each. Parody produces laughter by ridiculing hierarchy and social order. For Kristeva, the carnivalesque is an acute threat against established order; it silences laughter because it is murderous and revolutionary.³¹ Although the carnivalesque has a number of features, in Luke's passion narrative it shows up especially as the inversion of the ideological perspectives of the narrative and the debasing of the sacred.³²

With respect to intertextuality, the primary point I wish to make is that the inclusion of one textual pattern in a new text creates a figuration, the meaning of which goes beyond what either text expresses on its own. The precursor text derives from an established cultural repertoire that speaks with a voice in its own context that is altered by its incorporation in the successor text. It is possible for a successor text to attempt to silence the precursor, but even then the silencing is apparent only where the precursor's voice still speaks as that which is silenced. A case in point is the proverb preserved in Ezek 18:2: "The forebears have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." The same proverb appears in Jer 31:29 (38:29 LXX), but only to be negated by the next verse: "Everyone will die for his or her own sin, and the teeth of the very one who eats sour grapes will be set on edge." For the successor to be perceived as annulling the precursor, the precursor must still speak. The tensive relationship between precursor and successor may produce distinct kinds of figurations, but the relationship is nevertheless figurative. This is to say that the figuration produces new perspectives on the perception of the reality to which the text(s) point.

On the other hand, precursor texts often remain unexpressed or partially unexpressed, and the successor text is in a relationship of intertextuality because it evokes recall of a text that is not explicitly expressed. Michael Riffaterre calls such a precursor text the "hypogram."³³ To give a simple case, I have a friend who expresses the sense of the swift passage of time by saying: "Time flies whether you are having fun or not." It goes without saying that he expects anyone who hears this also to catch the hypogram from the cultural repertoire: "Time flies when you are having fun." I will soon turn to the way Luke uses scriptural precursors in the passion narrative, and I trust that this brief discussion of intertextuality illustrates how it is entirely plausible that

31 Kristeva, *Desire*, 80.

32 See the morphology of the carnivalesque in Peter Stallybass, "Drunk with the Cup of Liberty: Robinhood, the Carnavalesque and the Rhetoric of Violence in Early Modern England," *Semiotica* 54.1/2 (1985), 113–14.

33 Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 12–13.

successor texts evoke recall of hypograms that are present by allusion whether overtly or not.³⁴

Competing Constructs of Reality

The figurations of both irony and the carnivalesque are dualistic in that they reflect two constructs of reality competing with one another. In one sense they are also dialogical in that both constructs have their own say. Indeed, Raj Nadella proposes that competing voices in Luke fit Bakhtinian dialogue where each voice speaks on its own with equal force in the narrative.³⁵ Bakhtin describes Dostoevsky's dialogical method of allowing characters to speak in their own voices without using his own authorial perspective to control them. But as I intend to show, the superior level of irony over an inferior level and the narrator's responses in Luke to the carnivalesque, especially in the form of scriptural intertextuality, installs one voice above the other. Nevertheless, this does not diminish that two constructs of reality both come to expression and are in competition. One purports to be an integrated and stable understanding of reality. The other opens the way to disintegration and instability. In terms of the Lukan context under consideration, one is a divine perspective on reality that is called God's βασιλεία. The other is expressed in the parable of the Minas in the person of a regional ruler in Roman imperial systems.

From the Minas to Jesus' Passion

Close to the end of his article on the parable of the Minas, Braun makes a brief, intriguing observation that he leaves undeveloped. In the plot of Luke the crucifixion of Jesus corresponds to the slaughter of the enemies of the king in the parable. That is, Jesus' death involves Pilate and Herod who are rulers in

34 Richard Hays, "The Conversion of the Imagination: Scripture and Eschatology in 1 Corinthians," *NTS* 45 (1999): 391–412; Ruben Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables of Jesus: Methods and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 62. Kathy Ehrensperger also emphasizes the importance of unexpressed scriptural contexts from the perspective of scriptural reasoning ("Scriptural Reasoning: The Dynamic that Informed Paul's Theologizing," *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 5.3 [2005], esp. section 3.e, <http://jsr.shanti.virginia.edu/back-issues/vol-5-no-3-october-2005-teaching-and-scriptural-reasoning/scriptural-reasoning-the-dynamic-that-informed-pauls-theologizing/>).

35 Raj Nadella, *Dialogue Not Dogma: Many Voices in the Gospel of Luke*, LNTS 431 (London: T&T Clark, 2011).

imperial systems who correspond to the client king in the parable.³⁶ I would add that strong confirmation of the correspondence of the death of Jesus with the slaughter of the king's enemies emerges from Acts 4:25–28, an intertextual appropriation of Ps 2:1–2 LXX, which is cited verbatim. At the same time the prayer in Acts 4:25–28, which includes an interpretation of the death of Jesus, implies that at the point of dying, Jesus plays a role like the Davidic ruler in Ps 2.

As is always the case with intertextuality, the taking up of the textual pattern from Ps 2 in Acts 4, creates a tensive relationship that produces a new figuration. Each text expresses something in its own voice, but the precursor text necessarily speaks in its own voice at the same time as that voice is modified by its new context. As I indicate above, the interplay of disparate voices in the successor text says something that neither text expresses on its own. Specifically, on its own Ps 2 uses ἔθνη and λαοί, and βασιλεῖς and ἄρχοντες in synonymous parallelism to refer to non-Israelite nations and their rulers who form a coalition and against the Lord³⁷ and against Israel as embodied in the Davidic ruler, who is called the Lord's anointed (κατὰ τοῦ χριστοῦ).

Acts clearly wishes to make this text from Ps 2 analogous to the crucifixion of Jesus, whom Acts 4:27 identifies as God's "holy παῖς" ("child," "servant"), one whom God anointed, with some analeptic recall of Jesus' baptism (Luke 3:22), which Luke 4:18 also elaborates as Jesus' anointing. Moreover, at his baptism a heavenly voice ascribes to him the identity of God's beloved son. The correspondence of Pilate and Herod Antipas with the rulers who come together in Ps 2 is explicit, but whereas Ps 2 takes ἔθνη and λαοί as a hendiadys that refers to foreign nations, Acts reads ἔθνη and λαοί as pointing separately to non-Israelite and Israelite collaborators with Rome's client rulers, Pilate and Herod. As I have indicated, a matter that has emerged from studies in intertextuality is the way in which allusions to part of a text often serve as a synecdoche of the larger text. Indeed, intertextuality is most effective when it evokes recall on the part of readers/hearers of elements of the hypogram that are unexpressed.³⁸

In this respect, for interpreters of Acts 2:25–28 who know Ps 2:4 well enough, the citation evokes the larger context of the psalm. For example, Ps 2 inverts the direction of the mockery that antagonists aim at the Lord's anointed. In Jesus' trials and on the cross itself antagonists aim their derision at Jesus. In Ps 2:4 the Lord is the one who "will ridicule them." The figuration of the intertextuality as irony concerning who is being mocked is inescapable. Psalm 2:8 raises a momentous claim about the nations becoming a part of the "inheritance," which

36 Braun, "Reframing," 448.

37 "Lord" = κύριος, which corresponds to Yahweh in the Hebrew of Ps 2.

38 See n. 34.

it then explains literally as the “ends of the earth” as Israel’s possession. The line of thought is subtle, but the inheritance of “the world” in Ps 2:8 resonates powerfully with the synthesis of Davidic and Abrahamic covenants, which also occurs in Luke 1 by means of the sequence of Gabriel’s annunciation to Mary and Mary’s *Magnificat*. Gabriel interprets the promise of the Davidic covenant that “there will be no end to his kingdom” both chronologically and geographically (1:33), that is, an *eternal* kingdom that extends to the *whole earth*. And with Gabriel’s promise in mind just where Luke’s readers/hearers would expect Mary to develop the Davidic covenant, she jumps to the Abrahamic: “... just as he promised to our forebears, to Abraham and to his seed forever” (1:55). At this point it is important to note that, in the cultural repertoire, strong Israelite traditions had extended the inheritance of land for Abraham’s descendants to encompass the entire planet on which we live.³⁹ Literarily Gabriel and Mary have cooperated in synthesizing the Davidic and Abrahamic covenants, a synthesis that Zechariah confirms in 1:69–72. Psalm 2 likewise synthesizes the two covenants and makes the limits of the Davidic kingdom correspond to the extension of the Abrahamic inheritance to encompass the whole world.

However, Luke gives substantial attention to talk about kingship with respect to Jesus before getting around to his death. Neither Vinson nor Braun neglects the surfacing of this talk in Jesus’ proclamation of God’s βασιλεία. His anointing with the Spirit in Luke 4:18 is for the purpose of “good-newsing” (the Greek is a verb), and in 4:43 readers/hearers discover that Jesus is good-newsing God’s βασιλεία programmatically. However, for both Vinson and Braun, Jesus’ place in God’s βασιλεία is delayed beyond the end of the Gospel of Luke.

To be sure, according to Peter’s speech in Acts 2:24–35, Jesus is enthroned at God’s right hand *after* the resurrection and ascension. But is it not overly simplistic to claim that his place in God’s βασιλεία is postponed until resurrection and ascension? In the days of his ministry, he had already given his disciples power over demons in order to manifest God’s βασιλεία (Luke 9:1–2; 10:9), and he himself had been disarming the powers in Satan’s βασιλεία such that he could claim that God’s βασιλεία had come (11:20). Was his proclamation of God’s βασιλεία not also performative in the present tense of his macarism of 6:20: “Blessed are you poor, because God’s βασιλεία is yours”? In other words, readers/hearers of Luke are established in a position that gives them a superior

39 It is beyond the purview of this article, but examples of the extension of the promise of land to the “ends of the earth,” that is, “the world” as in Ps 2:8 are Sir 44:19–21; Jub 17:3; 19:21; 22:14; 32:18, *Mek.* Exod 14:31; Philo, *Life of Moses*, 1.155; Rom 4:13; Heb 2:5; Matt 5:5; 1 Cor 6:2. On this universality in Ps 2:8 see Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, OTL (Westminster: Philadelphia, 1962), 114.

level of knowledge over the competing view of reality that Jesus is in league with Satan's βασιλεία.

One issue in particular is the standing of the acclamation of Jesus as king in his entry into Jerusalem. On the one hand, Vinson takes the triumphal entry to be an indicator of the kind of king Jesus is in contrast to the client king of the parable.⁴⁰ On the other hand, Vinson takes all the ascriptions of Jesus as king following the parable of the Minas to be parody and irony.⁴¹ For him, this is a bit complicated. He distinguishes what the characters in the storyline understand, inasmuch as they do not yet know about Jesus' resurrection and ascension, and what readers/hearers of Luke understand because they do know about Jesus' exaltation.⁴² For his part, Braun takes the acclamation of Jesus as king in 19:38 as a further misunderstanding of Jesus' kingship.⁴³ In my view, the characters in the story do not have to wait on the resurrection and ascension to understand that God's βασιλεία that is manifest in Jesus is altogether unlike Roman imperial systems. If the parable has achieved its function internal to the storyline of Luke, the disciples make their acclamation precisely in contrast to the parable's client king. Further, the parallelism in the acclamation makes Jesus' kingship the way of peace (19:38), which Jesus immediately laments is hidden from Jerusalem's eyes (19:42). In addition, the proclamation of "peace in heaven and glory in the highest" recalls the message to the shepherds in 2:14. Finally, Jesus' declaration that the divine necessity for the acclamation would have required the stones to cry out had his disciples not voiced it, can hardly mean anything other than an affirmation of Jesus as "the king who is coming in the name of the Lord" (19:38). These factors confirm Culpepper's emphasis on the "distinctive features of Jesus' kingship" with respect to the king of the parable.⁴⁴ Irony is most certainly alive here, because the parable depicts one image of kingship for which the disciples' acclamation and Jesus' lament provide a superior level of understanding. Simultaneously, the failure of some Pharisees (19:39) or indeed of Jerusalem (19:42) to recognize this reality represents an ironic, deficient construct of reality.

Again, both Vinson and Braun point to intensified references to Jesus' kinship in accusations or mockery in Jesus' trials and crucifixion as unreliable,

40 Vinson, "Minas," 73, 76.

41 Vinson, "Minas," 77.

42 Vinson clarified this subtle distinction in correspondence with me.

43 Braun, "Abject Kingdom," 21. Here Braun is explicitly contrasting his understanding of Vinson's reading with Culpepper's interpretation of the parable as illuminating the sharp distinction in Jesus' kinship from that of the client king (Culpepper, "Luke," 363).

44 Culpepper, "Luke," 363.

farcical misunderstandings that demonstrate how far removed Jesus is from kingship. I have no quarrel up to this point. But I wish to suggest that the accusations and mockery take on a different significance under consideration of levels of figuration. This is to say that they are expressions of a construct of reality that is at odds with God's βασιλεία even before Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

After the parable of the Minas and before Jesus' crucifixion, Jesus revisits the question of kingship, not just for himself but for the twelve. In Luke 22:24, strife arises about who among them would be regarded as the greatest. Jesus expresses to them in direct discourse a comparison that replicates his characterization of the client king in the parable of the Minas: "The kings of the nations rule over them, and those who exercise power over them have themselves called benefactors.⁴⁵ But this is not the way for you" (22:25–26). Then he concludes the comparison by portraying his own relationship with the twelve—"I am among you as one who serves" (22:27). Jesus has already been playing his role as an alternative to Roman client kings. But this is not quite the end because he then bestows *kingship on them*—sitting on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (22:30). In other words, they are to play roles in the community that takes shape in Acts, but also already exists among Jesus' followers who belong to a group who have bound themselves together in a way of life that is an alternative to Roman imperial systems.

Carnavalesque mockery begins at the conclusion of the arrest of Jesus in a narrator's summary (Luke 22:63–65). Those who held Jesus in custody attempt to reduce his prophetic identity to absurdity by hitting him while he is blindfolded: "Prophecy. Who is the one who struck you?" For Luke's readers/hearers, the taunters are victims of irony because in 18:32 Jesus had indeed predicted this very event itself.

Although Jesus is not yet mocked as king, the stage is set, and readers/hearers do not have to wait long for interchanges that broach Jesus' identity as the anointed one. An initial interrogation creates a dialogue that challenges Jesus to claim his messianic identity (22:67). Jesus' response is what Bakhtin refers to as a submissive concession to the hopelessness of what his interrogators demand.⁴⁶ First Jesus classifies the discussion as futile—his interlocutors will not engage in genuine dialogue in which they will understand and accept what he says (22:67–68). But then he shifts the subject to his imminent installation as son of man at God's side. At this point, Jesus is using "son of man" in

45 On the translation in the passive see John Nolland, *Luke*, vol. 3, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1993), 1064.

46 Bakhtin, *Problems*, 212.

the sense of his function in judgment, which turns out to be an inversion of the *judgment in this trial* that is taking place at that very moment.⁴⁷ The catchword “son” is the only connection I can see between this claim and the conclusion that his interrogators draw: “Are you therefore God’s son?” (22:70). On the one hand, this confirms his perception that they will not understand. But 22:70 is also another concession to futility that cannot serve as *his self-perception* because he identifies “son of God” as his *interlocutors’ perception*: “You are the ones who say that I am” (22:70). How ironic, then, that they claim that what came out of *their mouth* is damning testimony on *Jesus’ lips* (22:71)!

This comedy of errors continues in the accusation before Pilate. First in 23:2 there is an analeptic recall of 20:25 where Jesus masterfully manipulates a trap question about paying taxes to Caesar. He gives an enigmatic response consisting of two statements that can never express the separation of “church and state” because they rebound off of each other like infinite reflections between two mirrors: “Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.” Assuredly his response gives priority to God.⁴⁸ However, one can never arrive at a definitive conclusion but must forever ponder what belongs to whom. This too evades the understanding of Jesus’ interrogators, and because the trap in 20:20–26 did not succeed, they can only prevaricate: “We found this man ... forbidding tribute to Caesar and saying that he is an anointed king” (23:2).⁴⁹ Pilate’s reaction to these accusations can hardly be anything other than sarcastic carnivalesque mockery: “*You* [emphatic] are the king of the Jews?”

Jesus’ response plays on the nature of kingship: *τὸ λέγεις* (23:2). On one level of knowledge, readers/hearers have absorbed Gabriel’s prediction in 1:32–33. However, in the progressive development of what is true in the narrative world they have had their expectations repeatedly revised, for example, by such proclamations as “love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you” (6:27–28). But most especially Jesus has provided a parable and a negative portrayal of conventional Roman imperial systems that revise readers/hearers’ expectations. The first is the parable of the Minas; the other is an explicit contrast between the kind of rule Jesus bestows on the twelve in comparison with client kings in imperial systems (22:25–30). With these revisions in expectations behind them, readers/hearers have a superior level of understanding that holds sway over the fabricated accusations of 23:2. Although the

47 Richard Horsley, *Sociology and the Jesus Movement* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 109.

48 James Dawsey, “Confrontation in the Temple: Luke 19:45–20:47,” *PRSt* 11 (1984): 153–65, 162.

49 BDAG asserts that although *χριστός* is used as an adjective in the LXX, in the NT it is always a noun. My translation here reads the anarthrous term as an adjective.

accusation that Jesus prohibits tribute to Caesar and claims to be an anointed king are fabrications in the mouths of antagonists, from the reader's/hearer's superior level of knowledge even their falsehoods and Pilate's sarcasm echo with irony. They say more than they mean.

The mosaic of carnivalesque mockery builds with the scene before Herod Antipas. Not only does the literary feature of ridicule show up here, which is an attempt to reduce Jesus to utter absurdity (ἐξουθενήσας = literally "to make [someone] nothing," 23:11), but Herod and his soldiers also reenact the coronation of the carnival king by dressing Jesus in royal apparel. Interpreters often find Herod's behavior surprisingly lenient, given that in 13:31 he wishes to kill Jesus. But as Kristeva maintains, the carnivalesque is viciously murderous.⁵⁰ Indeed, the continuing plot of Luke 23 corresponds to the coronation of the mock king in the Persian Sacian festival, in which the "king" was subsequently stripped, flogged, and hanged (Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses*, 4.66–69). And as Braun accurately indicates, this happens to Jesus at the hands of imperial rulers who correspond to the client king in the parable of the Minas.⁵¹

Four further incidents add to the carnivalesque treatment of Jesus. First, some of the ruling elite (ἄρχοντες, 23:35) ridicule Jesus saying, "He saved others, let him save himself if he (emphatic) is God's chosen anointed one." Second, soldiers echo the taunt that Jesus should save himself, but they ascribe an alternative carnivalesque title to him: "If you are the king of the Ἰουδαῖοι, save yourself" (23:37). Third, Jesus is crucified under an inscription, "This is the king of the Ἰουδαῖοι" (23:38). Finally, one of the malefactors crucified with Jesus also repeats the taunt that if Jesus is the anointed one he should save himself and the two malefactors who are crucified with him (23:39).

If Luke had allowed this mockery to stand without rebuttal, Vinson and Braun would have a stronger case for saying that Jesus' kingship is delayed until the resurrection and ascension. But Luke gives responses that rebut the carnivalesque attempts to reduce Jesus to absurdity. For one thing, irony emerges in the several taunts that Jesus should save himself because the narrative has already established an ideological perspective for readers/hearers that those who seek to save their own life will lose it (9:24).⁵² For another, Luke has other characters offer evaluations of Jesus that contest the carnivalesque reduction to absurdity. One is the penitent malefactor who controverts his counterpart. Significantly, he uses the language of Jesus' βασιλεία at an indeterminate time in the future: "Remember me when [indeterminate] you come into your

⁵⁰ Kristeva, *Desire*, 80.

⁵¹ Braun, "Reframing," 447–48.

⁵² Robert Tannehill, *Luke*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 342–43.

βασίλεια" (23:42). It remains unclear how the penitent malefactor will be with Jesus in paradise, but what is clear is that Jesus does not reserve his inclusion in his βασιλεία for the future but makes it imminently present: "today" (23:43). And it is difficult to avoid that this resonates with the taunt of the rulers "he saved others ..." (23:35), so that Luke's Jesus views the salvation of (an)other ironically different from the way the rulers construe reality. He does save another then and there!

In a most prominent way, however, Luke counters a carnivalesque construal of Jesus' kingship by imbuing the narrative with allusions to Israel's scriptures. Immediately before his arrest, Jesus enigmatically counsels his disciples to reverse his instructions in 10:4 not to take provisions for their mission and in addition to sell their cloak and buy a sword. What is not enigmatic is that this directive is accompanied by a citation of Isa 53:12, "He was reckoned among the lawless." Jesus then adds a short sentence that I think the NRSV translates appropriately in the progressive present: "What is written about me is being fulfilled." This sets an interpretive stage for understanding his arrest and crucifixion.

In my brief remarks about intertextuality above, I pointed to the way allusions may evoke a hypogram that is unexpressed and often are most effective when readers/hearers must supply the hypogram. But for readers/hearers to recall the hypogram, it must have recognizable currency in the cultural encyclopedia. Without documenting the ready availability of the larger context of Isa 53 in Israel's traditions of New Testament times (for example in 1 Enoch and Wisdom of Solomon), which I have demonstrated elsewhere,⁵³ suffice it to say that the "fulfillment" that Jesus claims in 22:37 evokes an Isaianic context of hope in the power of God in the midst of derision, rejection, and suffering.⁵⁴

Luke 23:34b and 35 also evoke Ps 21 LXX. The first is an abridged but virtually verbatim repetition of v. 19 accommodated to refer to Jesus: "They cast lots and divided his garments."⁵⁵ The second is a more subtle but nevertheless clear recall of vv. 8–9 LXX. The rulers in Luke 23:35 enact the plot of Ps 21:8 especially with the verb increasing the reiteration of their mockery by using the imperfect ἐμυκτηρίζον where the psalm had used the aorist. Further, in Ps 21:9 LXX God is the subject of σωσάτω: "He hoped in the Lord. Let [the Lord] deliver him, let [the Lord] save him, because [the Lord] cares for him." The rulers make Jesus the subject of σωσάτω: "Let him save himself" (23:35). This is a move

53 Robert Brawley, *Text to Text Pours Forth Speech: Voices of Scripture in Luke-Acts*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 50.

54 Brawley, *Text to Text*, 51, 58.

55 Apparently, this includes the splendid robe that Herod and his soldiers put on Jesus.

in intertextuality that Harold Bloom enigmatically names “clinamen,” which refers to a twist that produces irony, and “kenosis,” which means that the successor text empties the precursor text of its meaning.⁵⁶ This is to say that the rulers warp the words of the psalm to make it a part of their carnivalesque mockery of Jesus, and they empty σωσάτω of its divine content to demand that Jesus save himself. But for readers/hearers who know the cultural repertoire, the voice of the psalm echoes with profound irony: “He hoped in the Lord, let [the Lord] save him, because [the Lord] cares for him.”⁵⁷

Thematic development along the lines of both trust and hope in God builds in Jesus’ last words, which are a virtual citation of Ps 30:6 LXX: “Into your hands, I will entrust my spirit.” This saying is altered only to make the verb present rather than future: “Into your hands, I entrust my spirit” (Luke 23:46). With respect to the cultural repertoire, these very words serve in rabbinic tradition as a bedtime prayer (*b. Ber.* 4b–5a). Because the tradition is later than Luke, we cannot be certain that it served as such a prayer in Jesus’ time. Nevertheless, this speaks to the prominence of the psalm in the cultural repertoire. Further, pertinently Jesus cites only the first half of the line, and his citation is all the more effective if readers/hearers complete the verse from their knowledge of the psalm: “Into your hands I entrust my spirit; *you have redeemed me O Lord, God of truth.*”⁵⁸ In short, allusions to scripture in Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion function to counter the carnivalesque attempts to reduce Jesus to absurdity by juxtaposing it with a construct of reality that centers on trust and hope in the power of God.

Conclusion

Briefly put, the inhumanity of the throne seeker in Luke 19:11–27 is an insurmountable barrier to making him correspond to Luke’s understanding of Jesus as God’s anointed king. Luke’s Jesus dies as the king of the Ἰουδαῖοι, but he most certainly is not the kind of callous rogue who struts and frets his hour upon the stage in the parable of the Minas.

56 Bloom repeatedly uses these and additional designations for the figurations created by intertextuality in several works. See e.g., *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 14–16.

57 Brawley, *Text to Text*, 55–56.

58 Brawley, *Text to Text*, 57–58.

Murmuring Sophists: Extratextual Elements in Luke's Portrayal of Pharisees

John A. Darr

In the beginning of literary critical study of the New Testament, R. Alan Culpepper's pioneering *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (1983) introduced numerous interpretive guidelines and principles that continue to influence gospel research today. Several of Culpepper's notable methodological innovations regarding characters and characterization undergird the present study: (1) intermediate figures like the Pharisees often fulfil basic plot functions, exemplifying positive or negative responses to Jesus and serving as foils to the protagonist; (2) characters are shaped to a great extent in relation to other characters and to the narrator; and (3) the *text* does not provide all of the information necessary to understand gospel characters. Rather, it must be supplemented by (what I call) the *extratext* (short for *extratextual repertoire*), that is, contemporary historical and social information and literary conventions that the authorial reader was expected to know and bring *to the text* in order to actualize it.¹ Because much of the contextual and conventional knowledge that Luke assumed on the part of his readers has been forgotten, modern interpreters must recover and re-apply it to gospel figures. In what follows, I map the extratext behind Luke's Pharisees and perform an initial survey of one of its vital, but mostly unexplored regions.

Luke's Pharisees as Faceless Foes in a Dissonant Narrative

The dangers of attempting to read and interpret Luke apart from its original cultural milieu were dramatically described by David Moessner in his 1989

¹ R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, Foundations and Facets (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 7–8, 102, 104, 205–227. On the extratext, see John A. Darr, *On Character Building: The Reader and the Rhetoric of Characterization in Luke-Acts*, Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 26–29, 48–49; *Herod the Fox: Audience Criticism and Lukan Characterization*, JSNTSup 163 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 36–42, 54–63, 89–91.

book, *Lord of the Banquet: The Literary and Theological Significance of the Lukan Travel Narrative*. Luke's central section (9:51—19:44) appears highly dissonant regarding the relationship between its form and content. It seems to present us with a collection of "traditions piled willy nilly without regard for a plan," "a disturbingly stubborn disunity," a "mysterious maze," and—most strikingly—"vast 'wastelands' of colorless crowds and faceless foes."² What, if anything, holds it all together? Should we read it as a fateful, tragic journey, as a meandering teaching trip, as a gastronomic tour that features Jesus eating and drinking in various venues with an array of fellow diners? In short, the plot is seriously gapped and difficult to follow; and the characters' identities, roles, and motivations are often unclear. Luke's attempt to present readers with an "orderly" (see καθεξῆς, Luke 1:3) narrative appears to founder in his lengthy account of Jesus' peripatetic ministry.

Interpreters' attempts to solve the problems Moessner describes so vividly must address the attendant issue of how Pharisees fit into the enigmatic mix because, among the seemingly "faceless foes" (to borrow Moessner's term) of Jesus, they take pride of place. Apart from the disciples, the Pharisees appear more often than any other character group in Luke's narrative. They interact not only with Jesus, but also with the disciples, the crowds, toll collectors, and sinners of various stripes. Even a brief comparison with the other Synoptic Gospels reveals Luke's exceptional interest in the Pharisees. He mentions them more often than do the other evangelists and frequently includes unique material about them, notably: a series of acrimonious and open-ended dinner scenes in Pharisees' houses (7:36–50; 11:37–54; 14:1–24); an episode in which Pharisees warn Jesus about Herod the Tetrarch (13:31–35); a parable featuring a Pharisee (18:9–14); the narrator's bald accusation that they were "lovers of money" (φιλάργυροι, Luke 16:14); and an account of Pharisees asking Jesus to rebuke his disciples at his entry into Jerusalem (19:39). And, of course, Pharisees continue to appear at crucial junctures in Acts. Gamaliel, a leading Pharisee, advises the Sanhedrin about disciplining apostles on trial (Acts 5:34–42). At the Jerusalem Conference, Pharisaic believers oppose dropping the circumcision requirement for Gentile Christians (15:5). And Paul refers to his Pharisaic background at several strategic points during his trials (22:3; 23:1–10; 26:4–5). Despite this impressive set of idiosyncratic materials, however, Luke's Pharisees remain *schematic and obscurely motivated* without reference to extratextual information. They frequently oppose Jesus and his disciples, but what kind of opponents are they? Who are these guys, readers may well ask; and why are they

2 David P. Moessner, *Lord of the Banquet: The Literary and Theological Significance of the Lukan Travel Narrative* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 31–33.

acting like that? When their questions are not resolved within the text itself, readers (and interpreters) turn elsewhere for answers.

Luke's Pharisees as Familiar Foes in Typical Situations

We can address some of Moessner's concerns about dissonance and obscurity in Luke's central section both by broadening the scope of passages treated to include what precedes Luke 9:51 and by adjusting our methodological lenses to discern how an authorial audience, reading sequentially, builds consistency of character and plot among apparently discrete textual elements.³ After all, the Pharisees enter the story long before 9:51; and Jesus' teaching to that point provides many clues for how the so-called travel narrative unfolds. Nevertheless, Moessner is correct that some sort of *external scaffolding*—what he terms an “extrinsic literary comparison”—was necessary for readers to structure and fill out this gapped and often opaque text.⁴

Moessner's “extrinsic literary comparison” is like the extratext to which I refer, but the latter is broader and more diverse than the former, a difference attributable to somewhat divergent concepts of Luke's authorial audience. Rather than trace lengthy arguments about the identity of Theophilus and various kinds of readers, I simply affirm a growing scholarly consensus, namely, that Luke wrote in the late first or early second century for readers familiar both with the Jewish scriptures in Greek, and with the broader Hellenistic culture in the eastern provinces of the Roman empire.⁵ Were there standard ways of representing intellectual and religious opponents that Luke could assume formed part of this audience's bi-cultural repertoire? In other words, did widely acknowledged patterns of characterization (traits, roles, motivations, functions) derived from shared social knowledge and literary convention bring Luke's Pharisees into sharper focus and contribute to greater coherence in his broader narrative?

3 On the relevance of sequential reading and consistency building for understanding Lukan characterization, see Darr, *On Character Building*, 38–43.

4 Moessner, *Banquet*, 7–8.

5 Even a cursory reading reveals that Luke expected his readers to have a deep and intimate knowledge of the Septuagint and to be invested in Jewish identity issues. He wrote for a Jewish or highly judaized audience. The fact that he climaxes his account with Paul addressing the Jewish leaders in Rome is especially significant in this regard. For cogent arguments about the essential Jewishness of Luke's intended audience, see Loveday C. A. Alexander, “What if Luke Had Never Met Theophilus?” *BibInt* 8 (2000): 164–67.

In portraying Pharisees, Luke drew on two familiar patterns for characterizing religious and intellectual opponents. First, and most obviously, Luke taps into the ubiquitous scriptural image of obdurate and recalcitrant Israelites who reject the Lord's true prophets and their messages. Second, Luke relies heavily on his intended readers' awareness of a set of pejorative Hellenistic conventions about sophists who act as foils to genuine philosophers. (Modern classicists sometimes refer to the latter as the "literary image of the sophist" to distinguish it from other kinds of evidence that may reveal less polemically charged information about actual sophists.) In other words, Luke prompts his reader to build the Pharisees as hybrids of the *murmurers* against Moses from biblical tradition on one hand, and the hypocritical, disputatious, and avaricious *sophists* who oppose true philosophers in popular Hellenistic imagination on the other.⁶ With these extratextual lenses in place, the Pharisees of the Lukan writings become familiar foes operating in typical situations.

My assertion that Luke's Pharisees are *literary hybrids* fashioned from both Jewish scriptural models and Graeco-Roman philosophical conventions builds upon prior, widely-recognized research showing that other Lukan characters, especially protagonists, are constructed in precisely this double-sided manner. Jesus, John the Baptist, the Jerusalem apostles, and Paul all appear in Luke's account as both Israelite prophets and Hellenistic philosophers. Based on the literary critical idea that characters provide the primary matrix for delineating other characters (see Culpepper's insights, detailed above), we rightly expect secondary figures like Pharisees to play the customary roles of those who interact with prophets and philosophers. This dynamic is precisely what we see with other intermediate characters like Jesus' disciples and political rulers in Luke-Acts. Peter, John, James, and their fellows appear both as followers of Jesus as he moves inexorably toward his fateful *exodus* (Luke 9:31) and as the circle of learners (μαθηταί) gathered around their revered philosopher-teacher.⁷ Herod the Tetrarch is both an evil Israelite king who pursues and attempts to kill prophets and an anxiety-prone Hellenistic tyrant before whom philosophers like Jesus and John the Baptist must exhibit *παρρησία*.⁸ These

6 On readers *building* characters from indicators provided in the text, see Darr, *On Character Building*, 16, 29–59.

7 This double representation of Jesus' adherents—as an Israelite prophet's followers on the one side, and as a Greek philosopher's or sophist's students on the other—was well-established within Christian tradition prior to Luke. However, Luke took this hybrid characterization to a new level. On the origins of these distinctive ways of depicting those around Jesus, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching* (New York; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989), 121–24; Vernon K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 87–94.

8 Darr, *Herod the Fox*, 92–136.

patterns of hybrid characterization prompt Luke's audience to return repeatedly to the same extratextual mother lodes in Jewish scripture and Graeco-Roman culture for help in building and assessing other character groups like the Pharisees, and even tertiary and less well-defined groups like the crowd (ὁ ὄχλος) and the people (ὁ λαός).⁹

Luke's intertextual reliance on scriptural prophetic models to construct his narrative of Jesus' ministry is a staple of modern Lukan criticism. In *Lord of the Banquet* (referenced above), for example, Moessner cogently resolved some of the literary problems he noticed in Luke's central section by demonstrating how Luke 9:51–19:44 is undergirded by and filled in at numerous points with references to Deuteronomy's account of Moses and the people in the wilderness. Other interpreters point to additional links between prophetic materials in the Septuagint and characters in Luke-Acts. Because intertextual scriptural linkage to Luke's Pharisees is well-explored territory, I will map it only briefly before turning to survey the far less-explored—but equally vital—extratextual sphere of conventions about sophists.

Luke's Pharisees as Rebellious and Obdurate Israelites

Recognizing, understanding, and properly responding to “the things that have been *fulfilled* among us” (Luke 1:1) clearly required knowledge of prior, putatively oracular texts that pointed toward the figures and events in this narrative. Luke banks on readers' familiarity with the Septuagint; with his opening statement, he prompts his audience to read with it in mind, drawing on its resources to fill gaps and link discrete textual elements. Sometimes cues for making intertextual links are broad, but often they are pointed and explicit. The latter is true in the case of Jesus as a prophet in the Mosaic tradition. In Luke's transfiguration scene, Jesus meets Moses and Elijah and—only in Luke—speaks with them of his upcoming “exodus” (9:31). A voice from heaven then identifies Jesus as the chosen one and demands, “Heed him.” Shortly thereafter, Jesus “sets his face toward Jerusalem” (9:51, 53) and begins a resolute, if meandering, journey toward that penultimate destination. The promised prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15–19), who will lead the people, and whose word the people

9 “Crowds” and “people” in Luke's account often serve as ἰδιῶται—conventional, uneducated audiences who interact in stereotyped ways with πεπαιδευμένοι, educated ones (philosophers and sophists). Luke's awareness of these standard social categories is evident in Acts 4:13, where the Sanhedrin is amazed that Peter and John, “unread and unlearned men” (ἄνθρωποι ἀγράμματοι καὶ ἰδιῶται), exhibit boldness of speech (παρρησία), a key trait of highly educated philosophers.

should heed, has appeared. But some neither follow nor heed him, just as some Israelites rebelled against Moses.

That the Pharisees and their cohorts will play the scriptural role of rebellious, unheeding Israelites in Luke is clearly signaled with their entry into the story. When Jesus forgives a paralytic's sins, they accuse him of blasphemy and "question him in their hearts" (5:21–22). When Jesus and his disciples *eat and drink* with sinners at a toll-collector's house, the Pharisees "murmur against them" (5:30). The reference to murmuring (γογγύζειν and cognates) is a pointed and unmistakable cue that the Pharisees parallel the wilderness generation that murmured against Moses, often over lack of food and drink (see e.g., Exod 15:24; Num 11:1; 14:29; 17:5; Deut 1:27). As reading progresses, Luke's audience continues to construct Pharisees as a character group along the lines of the grumbling and recalcitrant questioners of Moses' (and God's) authority and salvific actions.

Linking his text to the Septuagintal wilderness traditions, Luke not only gives his characters depth and definition, but also hangs the loose and sketchy plot of his so-called central section on the pre-set structure of the wilderness wanderings era. As Luke's Jesus, distracted by confrontations with complainers, wanders to and fro around Galilee, Samaria, and Judea, is he not simply recapitulating the meanderings of Moses and the stiff-necked wilderness generation? We should not allow attention to Moses and the wilderness generation to deafen us to other Septuagintal resources that play on the theme of the prophet repudiated by the people and their leaders, however. The scriptures are like a massive echo chamber, repeatedly re-casting this basic antagonism in different circumstances; and Luke draws from some of them as well. Many scholars point to the Elijah-Elisha narratives, which emulate the Moses story, as prime intertextual territory for Luke and his readers.¹⁰ Others look to Second Isaiah's post-exilic *new exodus* for keys to Luke's characterization and rhetoric.¹¹

Perhaps most explicitly and consistently, Luke tags the Pharisees as ironic exemplars of those whom Isaiah accuses of repeatedly failing to perceive

10 Recent examples include Thomas L. Brodie, *The Crucial Bridge: The Elijah-Elisha Narrative as Interpretive Synthesis of Genesis–Kings and a Literary Model for the Gospels* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000); John S. Kloppenborg and Jozef Verheyden, eds., *The Elijah-Elisha Narrative and the Composition of Luke*, LNTS 493 (London; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014).

11 David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*, WUNT 2:130 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); Peter Mallen, *The Reading and Transformation of Isaiah in Luke-Acts*, LNTS 367 (London; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2008); Holly Beers, *The Followers of Jesus as the "Servant": Luke's Model from Isaiah for the Disciples in Luke-Acts*, LNTS 535 (London; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015).

and respond to the prophetic word. They “keep on listening but do not hear, and keep on looking but do not see” because “their hearts have become dull” (Isa 6:9–10). Despite observing Jesus’ activities and teaching more often, and more carefully, than any group other than the disciples, Luke’s Pharisees remain unable to understand who he is. Though they *scrutinize* him (note Luke’s unique use of παρατήρησις and cognates), they never *recognize* him (Luke 6:7; 14:1; 17:20).¹² Luke attributes many negative ethical values to them to teach his readers that wrong heart attitudes cause spiritual deafness and blindness. In short, Luke relies heavily on readers’ knowledge of the Septuagint to depict Pharisees as obdurate rejecters of the prophet and his word.

Luke’s Pharisees as Sophists

The second, more novel aspect of my thesis is that Luke relies substantially on stock imagery about sophists to characterize Pharisees. A recent flurry of research on the so-called Second Sophistic has greatly enhanced our understanding of Hellenistic intellectual culture, but it has shed little light on the literary linking of gospel Pharisees to sophists. The few New Testament critics who do recognize such a connection have not unpacked its literary implications for understanding Luke’s narrative. Classical studies of intellectuals in the Roman Empire invariably focus on the late 2nd and early 3rd century CE, a fecund period when sophists, philosophers, and educated Christian apologists like Justin Martyr engaged in heated argumentation about doctrines, group identities, and social boundaries.¹³ But classicists’ concentration on this later period, along with a certain reluctance to conceive of the earliest Christian authors as intellectuals, results in an almost complete scholarly silence about how New Testament texts might fit into the discourse among (and about) educated elites (*pepaideumenoi*). Occasionally, those who study the Second

¹² Darr, *On Character Building*, 53–59, 91–126.

¹³ A small sample of relevant studies includes G. W. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969); Graham Anderson, *Sage, Saint, and Sophist: Holy Men and Their Associates in the Early Roman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Richard Lim, *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity*, *The Transformation of the Classical Heritage* 23 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Thomas Lechner, “Very Sophisticated? Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in der Welt der Zweiten Sophistik,” *Millenium* 8 (2011): 51–86; Kendra Eshleman, *The Social World of Intellectuals in the Roman Empire: Sophists, Philosophers, and Christians*, *Greek Culture in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Beatrice Wyss, “Der gekreuzigte Sophist,” *Early Christianity* 5 (2014): 503–527.

Sophistic will mention resonances between some of Paul's arguments in 1 and 2 Corinthians and rhetorical practices of the sophists. For the most part, however, they ignore 1st century Christian writings.

Biblical scholars have not been as reticent as their classicist colleagues to push investigation of Hellenistic intellectual culture in the eastern Mediterranean—especially regarding philosophers and sophists—back into the early first century CE and to demonstrate how this wider panorama aids our understanding of early Jewish and Christian literature.¹⁴ Steve Mason, for example, has shown that Flavius Josephus, in an attempt to mount an apologia for the Jews after their ill-fated rebellion against the Romans (65–70 CE), presented Judaism as a reputable philosophy, with Moses as its founding philosopher. Sadducees, Essenes, and Pharisees represent honorable sub-philosophies of overarching Jewish philosophy. In Josephus' scenario, the Pharisees come off as a highly respectable philosophical school (*hairesis*).¹⁵ Mason further demonstrated that, in the mode of Josephus (even if not directly dependent on him), Luke portrayed Christianity as a philosophical school within the orbit of Judaism, albeit one that, in contrast to Josephus' idealized vision of harmony among Jewish schools, mounted a harsh critique of the Jewish elites, accusing them of hypocrisy and abuse of wealth and power, typical criticisms in moral philosophy's arsenal.¹⁶ Mason does not refer to Luke's critique of Pharisees in terms of anti-sophist invective. But he clearly demonstrates that Luke was trying to present Christianity as a respectable intellectual option within Hellenistic culture.

Utilizing form-critical categories, Klaus Berger is much more specific than Mason concerning the kind of criticism the gospels leveled against the Pharisees: it was none other than the traditional *Sophistenpolemik* philosophers used against their opponents.¹⁷ This formalized repertoire of insult and accusation against intellectual rivals was well-entrenched within Hellenistic

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- 14 Bruce W. Winter, "Is Paul Among the Sophists?," *RTR* 53 (1994): 28–38; Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002); Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992); Mason, *Flavius Josephus on the Pharisees: A Composition-Critical Study* (Boston; Leiden: Brill, 2001); Klaus Berger, "Hellenistische Gattungen im Neuen Testament," *ANRW* 2, 25, 2 (1984), 1282–87; Berger, "Jesus als Pharisäer und frühe Christen als Pharisäer," *NovT* 30 (1988): 231–62; Luke T. Johnson, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic," *JBL* 108 (1989): 419–41; and Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, SP 3 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 191–93.
- 15 Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament*, 63–68.
- 16 Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament*, 216.
- 17 Berger, "Hellenistische Gattungen," 1285; and "Jesus als Pharisäer," 231.

Judaism of the 1st century CE, as evidenced most clearly in the works of Philo of Alexandria.¹⁸ Luke Johnson also identifies anti-sophist roots of a widespread insult culture of Hellenistic intellectuals and observes that, “as so often in Hellenistic rhetoric, these charges formed a *topos*, that is, a standard treatment of a subject.”¹⁹

In short, biblical scholars have compiled persuasive evidence for interpreting some New Testament texts against a backdrop of standardized Hellenistic invective against (purportedly) educated foes that were often tagged as sophists. I propose that we build on their foundational research by: (1) refocusing our interpretive lenses; and (2) drawing on new evidence from recent studies of the Second Sophistic. Refocusing interpretive lenses means shifting from form-criticism’s narrow concentration on the formal development of rhetorical sayings (e.g., insults), to literary criticism’s attention to broader literary subjects like narrative characterization. Instead of simply pointing to discrete rhetorical *topoi*, for example, the literary critic seeks *a set of traits commonly associated with a stock character (or character group) acting in conventional ways in typical settings (type scenes)* and then asks how the author of a particular narrative plays off of these conventions for rhetorical effect. Whether through recapitulation (reiteration and reinforcement) or defamiliarization (modification or even subversion) of such conventions, an author can manipulate audience responses and persuade them to certain ends.²⁰ Luke’s portrayal of Pharisees through the use of conventional sophist imagery is certainly a candidate for thorough literary analysis, but such an undertaking is not practicable in this short essay. Instead, I outline traits commonly associated with the literary image of sophists, show how those traits correspond to the Pharisees’ portrayal in Luke-Acts, and offer some suggestions as to how this extratextual repertoire functions in Luke’s narrative rhetoric.

We must keep two complicating factors in mind when reading about sophists in the ancient Hellenistic context. First, the common, pejorative literary image of sophists was to real sophists as our popular, negative image of lawyers and politicians is to actual persons in those professions: although these

18 Berger, “Hellenistische Gattungen,” 1282–83. Bruce Winter (*Philo and Paul*) has established that Philo was not writing in a social vacuum; real sophists, along with their schools, were powerful forces to reckon with in Philo’s Alexandria and Paul’s Corinth. We can assume that sophists were also influential in the other major cities of the eastern Roman Empire.

19 Johnson, “The New Testament’s Anti-Jewish Slander,” 432.

20 On Luke’s rhetorical skill in subverting Hellenistic conventions about body imagery, see Mikeal C. Parsons, *Body and Character in Luke and Acts: The Subversion of Physiognomy in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 108, 117–122, 144–45.

stereotypes have roots in social realities, they are essentially caricatures born of clichés and exaggeration. We know that the practice of law and public service are acceptable, even honorable, undertakings. Nevertheless, “lawyer” and “politician” have become shorthand epithets that, used in certain contexts, evoke deception, corruption, manipulation, and abuse of power. Likewise, sophists were actually among the most respected citizens in the leading cities of the eastern Roman Empire. Often they were elite teachers, rhetoricians, orators, lawyers, ambassadors, politicians, and civic benefactors in whose honor statues were erected.²¹ Indeed, the lines between sophists and their traditional rivals, the philosophers, frequently blurred; and these two categories of *pepaideumenoi* were conflated.²² Life sometimes imitated art when real sophists’ behavior reinforced the ubiquitous, pejorative stereotypes, but we must recognize the distinction between the stock literary image of sophists used to castigate a range of intellectual and religious leaders and sophists themselves.

Second, attribution of positive or negative identities to persons or groups in the early Roman Empire largely depended on perspective. The modern historian looking in on this era encounters a swirling kaleidoscope of intellectual and religious leaders, their disciples, hangers-on, and various “wannabes.” Social and religious categories, parties, and individual identities morph and merge with alarming frequency against “a backdrop of familiar religious and intellectual forces, and each is potentially capable of being seen in more than one way.”²³ Much depends on point of view: one person’s sage is another’s sophist. Lucian derisively tags Jesus as “that crucified sophist,” while Luke and Justin Martyr tout him as a great sage and resurrected deity.²⁴ In his apologetic writings from the end of the first century, Josephus portrays Judaism not as a religion, but as a respectable philosophy, with the Pharisees constituting one of its most reputable schools (resembling the Stoics). Writing at about the same time, however, Luke depicts the Pharisees not as estimable philosophers, but

21 The lexeme “sophist” could thus have either positive or negative connotations, and ferreting out the distinctions in ancient texts is difficult. The confusion may well be due to the lack of quality control and performance criteria in the field of education. Almost anyone could claim to be a sophist/teacher no matter his level of learning. See Beatrice Wyss, “Σοφιστής in der Kaiserzeit: Gescholtener Lehrer oder Gefeierte Redner?” in *Sophisten in Hellenismus und Kaiserzeit: Orte, Methoden und Personen der Bildungsvermittlung*, ed. Beatrice Wyss et al., STAC 101 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 210.

22 On the difficulties of defining philosophers and sophists over and against each other, see Gregory R. Stanton, “Sophists and Philosophers: Problems of Classification,” *AJP* 94 (1973): 350–58; Eshleman, *Sophists, Philosophers, and Christians*, 1.

23 Anderson, *Sage, Saint and Sophist*, 38.

24 Wyss, “Der gekreuzigte Sophist,” 503–507; Anderson, *Sage, Saint and Sophist*, 3.

as the conventional foils for philosophers, that is, as stereotypically dishonorable sophists.

The preceding remarks about the difficulties of defining groups in the early Roman Empire should give pause to those who wish to reconstruct the historical Pharisees on the basis of Luke-Acts or, indeed, gospel narratives in general.²⁵ What we can recover with some certainty and specificity is the extratextual backdrop for Luke's Pharisees—in this case, the conventional derogatory critique of sophists. We are far from the first to set ourselves to this task. The 2nd century CE lexicographer Julius Pollux of Naukratis, for example, gathered much of the conventional anti-sophistic invective under the entry "sophists" in his *Onomastikon*, a kind of thesaurus-dictionary: "Anyone who wishes to insult the sophist is able to utilize these known categories: sorcerer, deceiver, treacherous, cunning, malicious, showy, twisty as an eel, a mystery-monger, a shadow man, a criminal, jack of all trades, liar, artful, affected, and according to Plato, polychromatic, a minor peddler, a double dealer, a gold-seizing hunter of the young, a wage earner and mercenary, a parasite (sponger), flatterer, and attendant."²⁶ These (and other) characteristic, anti-sophistic charges fall into a number of overlapping categories as follows.

1. Sophists are avaricious.²⁷ This accusation, ubiquitous in ancient Hellenistic literature, goes back at least as far as Plato, who rails against sophists for peddling their worthless teachings for gold. Protagoras (5th century BCE), perhaps the original sophist, was supposedly the first teacher to take fees for lectures, thereby setting off a firestorm of criticism (mostly from philosophers) that endured through the Second Sophistic. Taking money for *paideia* was anathema to those who saw cultivation and transmission of wisdom as a sacred trust. In the 1st and 2nd centuries CE social circumstances were ripe for would-be teachers to live off of their declamatory and educational efforts. In order to succeed in public and professional life, young men needed to develop skills in rhetoric and oratory; and their fathers were willing to pony up large sums to those who promised to educate them in "the great art of persuasion."²⁸ With no universal standards or criteria for pedagogy, and with considerable money to be made, the field of education attracted numerous greedy but unqualified

25 Berger, "Jesus als Pharisäer," 231.

26 Pollux, *Onom.* 4:47–48; quoted by Wyss, "Der gekreuzigte Sophist," 518–19; author's translation.

27 Berger, "Hellenistische Gattungen," 1286; Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 39, 48, 166; Wyss, "Der gekreuzigte Sophist," 513.

28 Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 3.

individuals who were rather loosely defined as sophists. Much financial abuse ensued, and the trait of avariciousness became securely attached to sophists in the public imagination.

Luke characterizes Pharisees as avaricious most explicitly at Luke 16:14, where his narrator abruptly and without further explanation accuses them of being “lovers of money” (φιλάργυροι). Within its narrative context and with reference to the extratextual image of sophists Luke invokes, this charge is neither awkward nor unfounded as some have averred. In Luke 7:29–30 the narrator has already informed readers that the Pharisees refused John’s baptism, thereby rejecting God’s plan for them. Because John’s preaching in Luke focuses largely on the need to repent of sins of economic injustice, readers infer that the Pharisees reject John’s call because they are abusers of financial power.²⁹ From the moment the Pharisees enter the narrative (5:17), they serve as Jesus’ intellectual foils and take on aspects of the pejorative sophist image. Thus readers impute the conventional anti-sophist charge of avariciousness to them. At Luke 11:39 Jesus makes this implicit charge overt: “You Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of predatory greed [ἀρπαγῆς] and wickedness.” These preliminary observations suffice to justify further analysis of how Pharisees *cum* sophists function in Luke’s complex and lengthy narrative discourse on wealth ethics.

2. Sophists are motivated by love of fame and glory (φιλοδοξία).³⁰ The idea that sophists were obsessed with celebrity and status is widespread in ancient sources and reflects social realities of the time (though this trait was commonly exaggerated for the sake of insult). In the early Roman Empire, sophists, philosophers, and Christians comprised largely unstructured intellectual associations with permeable boundaries. Desire for clearer self- and group definition and enhanced status involved these *pepaideumenoι* in what Kendra Eshleman terms “a perpetual feedback loop” of contestation over matters of authority, affiliation, inclusion, exclusion, and social positioning in interactions with intellectual peers and the uneducated masses (ιδιωται).³¹ The sophists would “maneuver to see and be seen by the ‘right’ people and carefully manage their own professional contacts as a way of both positioning themselves and either

29 Darr, *On Character Building*, 99–101.

30 Eshleman, *Sophists, Philosophers, and Christians*, 76.

31 On the role of the uneducated masses in status contestations among intellectuals, see Eshleman, *Sophists, Philosophers, and Christians*, 68–77. Acclaim by crowds was not as coveted as approval from intellectual peers, but when popularity among the masses worked in one’s favor, it was sometimes claimed as credit.

endorsing or denying the status claims of others.”³² If we believe numerous accounts, sophists were fixated on issues of recognition, rank, and reciprocity. Were you invited to Herodes Atticus’ symposium? How did the crowd respond to your oration in the theater? Are your disciples welcomed or insulted by other teachers’ disciples? Such were the kinds of questions that concerned sophists and fueled self-promotional strategies and behaviors.

The clearest reference to Pharisees as status-seekers appears in Jesus’ condemnation: “Woe to you Pharisees, for you love to take the seat of honor in the synagogues and to be greeted respectfully in the markets” (11:43). Luke (alone among the evangelists) expands upon this conventional anti-sophist accusation by including several truncated symposia in which Pharisees interact with Jesus. In philosophical literature, the Hellenistic symposium had become a type-scene favored by authors wishing to exhibit and assess power dynamics and positioning among the *pepaideumenoí*.³³ These accounts foregrounded issues of inclusion and exclusion (who was invited, who was snubbed), as well as rank and function at the symposium. In each of Luke’s symposia, Jesus castigates his Pharisaic hosts either for excluding persons or groups (7:36–50; 14:12–14), or for coveting places of honor (11:43–44; 14:7–11). The Pharisees/sophists are denied status enhancement through association with Jesus at these symposia, and indeed are denounced for their attempts in this regard. Another condemnation of those who, like the Pharisees, “exalt themselves” over and against others appears in the parable of the Pharisee and the toll collector (18:9–14; only in Luke). Further examination of Pharisees as sophistic lovers of glory and status might shed light on the knotty problem of what Luke means by his opaque references to persons seeking “to justify themselves.”

3. Sophists are disputatious, polemical, strife-mongers.³⁴ This criticism is closely related to the charge of status-seeking (above). Competitive strife (*agon*) was deeply engrained in Greek culture in general, and in Hellenistic intellectual circles in particular. Vociferous public confrontation and disputation among sophists and philosophers was so common that it became a standard feature of popular expectation and a regular focus of criticism against

32 Eshleman, *Sophists, Philosophers, and Christians*, 39.

33 Sophists were represented at symposia. See Johann Goeken, “Orateurs et sophistes au banquet,” in *Sophisten in Hellenismus und Kaiserzeit: Orte, Methoden und Personen der Bildungsvermittlung*, ed. Beatrice Wyss et al., STAC 101 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 83–87.

34 Berger, “Hellenistische Gattungen,” 1286; Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 10, 126, 136–41; Bowersock, *Greek Sophists*, 89–100; Wyss, “Der gekreuzigte Sophist,” 515–16.

these groups.³⁵ Indeed, this charge may still be applicable today: “Throughout all of the accounts of sophistic animosity,” writes Bowersock, “there is a strongly academic odour. One recognizes that exquisite polemic which arises so naturally in communities of the highly educated.”³⁶ Too often, debate seemed to be in the service of status enhancement rather than seeking truth. Furthermore, sophists’ conflicts famously spilled over into more serious aggressions—insults, mockery, backbiting, gossip, physical assaults on rivals or their disciples—beyond formal arenas of debate. Attempts to humiliate, splinter, and expel opposing leaders and groups flourished in this rancorous social environment.³⁷

The disputatious and polemical character of the Pharisees surfaces repeatedly in Luke and Acts. Paul, a former Pharisee, banks on their contentiousness at his trial before the Sanhedrin; to deflect attention from his case, he drops a loaded topic (resurrection) into the proceedings and watches as Pharisees and Sadducees clamor and nearly come to blows (Acts 23:6–10). Typical sophists, Pharisees and their disciples take issue with Jesus and his disciples over all and sundry matters of affiliation (How can you eat and drink with sinners and toll collectors?) and practice (Why do you eat and drink when you should pray and fast?). As the animosity increases, Pharisee-sophists “dialogue in their hearts” against Jesus, mock him, and try to trap him in behavior or teachings against the law. In light of the sophist-like antagonism of Luke’s Pharisees, their warning to Jesus to flee from Herod the Tetrarch (13:31) appears not as a kindness, but as a ruse to expel a rival from their territory. In all these ways, then, the Pharisees function as conventional sophist foils to Jesus, the true philosopher.

4. Sophists are hypocrites.³⁸ The hypocrisy accusation was an extremely common element in stock characterizations of sophists. Philo, for example, averred that sophists’ spoken opinions were at variance with their thoughts, and their conduct was the opposite of their teachings. They pushed virtues like prudence, temperance and justice, but their behavior was foolish, intemperate, unjust, and impious.³⁹ In other words, sophists broke the bedrock philosophical tenet that one’s deeds must align with one’s words. This criticism is rooted in the ancient charge (by Plato and other philosophers) that the sophists use clever speech but lack true wisdom. Using cheap oratorical tricks and scholarly flourishes, they draw glory to themselves while manipulating and misleading

35 Lim, *Public Disputation*, 31–32.

36 Bowersock, *Greek Sophists*, 89.

37 Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 126, 136–37.

38 Berger, “Hellenistische Gattungen,” 1286.

39 *Det.* 72–73; quoted at length in Berger, “Hellenistische Gattungen,” 1282.

audiences into thinking that they have heard wise teachings.⁴⁰ Sophists are adept at seeming to be what they are not—true seekers after truth. Their hair-splitting, quibbling, arcane argumentation deceives their disciples into thinking that they are dealing with weighty philosophical matters. Sophists are thus bad teachers whose students either learn nothing or are actually harmed intellectually and morally by their instruction.⁴¹ The charge that sophists were able to manipulate audiences through speech morphed into the accusation that they were sorcerers and conjurers. In this vein, Philo even asserted that the serpent who tricked Eve was actually a sophist!⁴²

Jesus explicitly calls out the Pharisees as hypocrites when he warns his disciples to “beware the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1). This caution follows directly on his condemnation of Pharisees and lawyers for focusing on minutiae of the law while neglecting its deeper meanings: “Woe to you, Pharisees. You tithe mint and rue and herbs of all types, but neglect justice and the love of God” (11:42). They not only fail to grasp the law themselves, but also hinder those they teach from understanding and benefitting from it: “Woe to you lawyers. You have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering” (11:52).⁴³ Lack of true knowledge, coupled with hair-splitting and abuse of teaching authority, harm those who listen to their instruction.

5. Sophists appear as multitudes against philosopher rivals. Wyss notes that the ancient poet Kratinos referred to intellectual opponents as a “swarm of sophists.”⁴⁴ This charge is not widespread, but it is interesting given Luke’s depiction of the Pharisees. Luke introduces them into his account *en masse* (5:17): they came “from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem” to observe Jesus. This fraught scene is the auspicious beginning of a conflict that will finally develop into a monolithic antagonism to Jesus as the narrative continues. Led by Pharisees (reflecting both murmuring Israelites from the scriptures and hypocritical sophists from Hellenistic popular imagination),

40 Sirach 37:19–26 elaborates on this criticism of those who only appear to be wise.

41 Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 55; Wyss, “Der gekreuzigte Sophist,” 512–15.

42 Agr. 96, cited in Wyss, “Der gekreuzigte Sophist,” 519.

43 Note how Luke brings Pharisees and lawyers under the same umbrella at 11:45, where the lawyers protest, correctly, that Jesus’ criticisms of Pharisees also apply to them (and, the reader understands, vice versa).

44 “Der gekreuzigte Sophist,” 512.

this opposition will ultimately lead to the death of Jesus (the Mosaic true philosopher) in Jerusalem.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Far from being Jesus' "faceless foes," Luke's Pharisees were actually familiar to his audience—not from everyday experience ("the Pharisee down the block," as one critic put it), but from the "more fantastic world" of the literary and religious imagination of the day. This conclusion should caution us against using the gospel accounts as evidence for historical reconstructions of the Pharisees. Built on well-established literary conventions, Luke's Pharisees border on caricature. Furthermore, the patterns on which they were constructed should not be taken as historically accurate. Sophists were often honorable teachers, orators, and lawyers; and, of course, not all ancient Israelites failed truly to "see and hear" the Lord's prophets.

45 For a cogent study of this development, see David P. Moessner, "The 'Leaven of the Pharisees' and 'This Generation': Israel's Rejection of Jesus According to Luke," *JSNT* 34 (1988): 21–46.

Breathing New Life into Narrative Criticism: Postclassical Narratology and the Gospel of Luke

Michal Beth Dinkler

With *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (1983), Alan Culpepper definitively introduced narrative criticism as a new, muscular presence at the table of Johannine studies.¹ For the two decades following *Anatomy*, scholarly interest in the Gospels' narrative features spread, and the body of narratological work on New Testament narratives passed through its infancy and adolescence.² Predictably, scholarly conversations also arose about what that body of work might look like when it was fully mature.³ As tends to happen when bodies change and grow, New Testament narrative criticism came to look much different than it did in the days of its structuralist-inspired youth; amidst labors to define and refine the new approaches, New Testament narrative criticism matured, growing stronger and more sophisticated and, in the process, acquiring the kind of status that goes with stature.⁴ By the 1990s, many in the guild had come to appreciate the narrative-critical explorations that Culpepper had catalyzed.

- 1 R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).
- 2 E.g., Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke–Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); John Darr, *On Character Building: The Reader and the Rhetoric of Characterization in Luke–Acts* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992); Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Reading the New Testament Series (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002); Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Adele Berlin, eds., *Characterization in Biblical Literature*, *Semeia* 63 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993); Mary Ann Tolbert, “How the Gospel of Mark Builds Character,” *Int* 47 (1993): 347–57; Jean-Noël Aletti, *L'art de raconter Jésus-Christ. L'écriture narrative de l'Évangile de Luc*, Parole de Dieu (Paris: Seuil, 1989); Daniel Marguerat and Yvan Bourquin, *Pour lire les récits bibliques* (Paris: Cerf, 1998); Roland Meynet, *L'Évangile selon saint Luc. Analyse rhétorique*, 2 vols. (Paris: Cerf, 1988).
- 3 E.g., Stephen Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); David Rhoads and Kari Syreeni, eds., *Characterization in the Gospels: Reconceiving Narrative Criticism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); Petri Merenlahti, “The Future of Narrative Criticism: A Paradigm Shift,” in *Poetics for the Gospels?: Rethinking Narrative Criticism*, Study of the New Testament and Its World (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 115–30.
- 4 Some distinguish between *narratology* proper and *narrative criticism* as a unique brand of New Testament study. E.g., Scott Elliott, *Reconfiguring Mark's Jesus: Narrative Criticism after*

And yet, not all found strength and sophistication in New Testament scholars' appropriations of narratology. Some levied serious critiques, and some advocated abandoning the approach altogether. To these critics, narratology in New Testament studies was less like a living corpus and more like a corpse. Now, over thirty years after Culpepper's grand introduction, scholars remain divided vis-à-vis New Testament narrative criticism, with some continuing to celebrate its contributions and others sounding its death knell.

Who is correct? As attested by the chapters in this *Festschrift*, New Testament narrative criticism has not yet met its demise. It might be more accurate to say that it has taken ill. The excitement and momentum of narrative criticism's early days have waned, and its once-muscular presence at the methodological table of biblical studies has atrophied. Meanwhile, the field of narratology proper has been resurrected as a new body of work, now called postclassical narratology. This strand of literary theory is at once more unwieldy, more precise, and more theoretically robust than its earlier iterations. To date, however, few New Testament scholars have engaged with these narratological advancements.

I contend that postclassical narratology has the potential to breathe new life into narratological New Testament study. The purpose of this essay is to introduce postclassical narratology as it has developed in the broader world of literary theory to New Testament scholars, and to illustrate its benefits for interpreting the Gospel of Luke. Imagine this essay as a funnel: I begin broadly, with a general definition of postclassical narratology and how it differs from its classical predecessor. I then focus more narrowly on a particular preoccupation of postclassical narratology—i.e. the role of *experientiality* in historical narratives. The final section of the essay looks more specifically at postclassical narratology's potential contributions to Lukan studies, taking Jesus' so-called "Apocalyptic Discourse" in Luke 21 as a case study.

Postclassical Narratology: What It Is and Where It Came From

David Herman first introduced the phrase "postclassical narratology" in his 1997 article, "Scripts, Sequences, and Stories: Elements of a Postclassical

Poststructuralism (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011), 4. Like Ute Eisen, I use the terms interchangeably. Ute E. Eisen, *Die Poetik der Apostelgeschichte: Eine narratologische Studie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

Narratology.”⁵ Shortly thereafter, in the seminal edited collection *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*, Herman defined postclassical narratology “quite broadly, in a way that makes it more or less interchangeable with *narrative studies*”:

Narratology has moved from its classical, structuralist phase—a Saussurean phase relatively isolated from energizing developments in contemporary literary and language theory—to its postclassical phase. Postclassical narratology (which should not be conflated with poststructuralist theories of narrative) contains classical narratology as one of its “moments” but is marked by a profusion of new methodologies and research hypotheses: the result is a host of new perspectives on the forms and functions of narrative itself.⁶

In other words, at the cusp of the new millennium, narratology was marked not by a rejection of earlier iterations of the discipline, but by clarification, multiplication, and diversification within it.

In order to understand what was being clarified and diversified by the first phase of postclassical narratology, it can help to look further back in narratology’s life story. Of course, critical analysis of narrative features like plot, point of view, setting, and characterization is nearly as ancient as storytelling itself. Still, it was not until 1969 that Bulgarian narratologist Tzvetan Todorov coined the term “narratologie” for “la science du récit,” the modern theoretical analysis of narrative.⁷ In the edited volume *Postclassical Narratology: Approaches and Analyses*, Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik reflect on narratology’s beginnings:

David Herman’s volume *Narratologies* could be argued to represent the first adult phase in a *Bildungsroman*-like story of narratology. In this reading, Shklovsky and the Russian Formalists figure as narratology’s infancy and the structuralist models of the 1960s and 1970s as its adolescence.⁸

5 David Herman, “Scripts, Sequences, and Stories: Elements of a Postclassical Narratology,” *PMLA* (1997) 1046–59.

6 David Herman, “Introduction,” in *Narratologies: New Perspectives of Narrative Analysis*, ed. David Herman (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999), quotation from 2–3.

7 Tzvetan Todorov, *Grammaire du Décaméron* (The Hague: Mouton, 1969), 10.

8 Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik, “Introduction,” in *Postclassical Narratology: Approaches and Analyses*, ed. Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2010), 1–33, quotation from 4.

In other words, Todorov's 1969 label did not introduce a newcomer to the modern critical sphere; it simply gave a name to a movement that was, to echo Alber and Fludernik, already entering the time of its adolescence.⁹

Despite significant (often overlooked) differences between Russian Formalism and literary structuralism, an overarching disciplinary aim united them—one that often marks the adolescent years for humans, as well: the quest for independence. As the prominent Russian formalist Boris Eichenbaum put it, the ultimate goal of literary critics at that time was to redefine literary study as its own “independent science of literature.”¹⁰ What this means is that throughout its most formative years as a distinct discipline in literary theory, narratology was shaped by efforts to claim the legitimacy and status enjoyed by the so-called “hard” sciences. Consequently, narratology's adolescent phase was dominated by the search for an objectively identifiable set of underlying properties and rules that govern stories from all times and places.

As these basic principles were coalescing, narratologists also came to expand the object of their study beyond literature into other modes of storytelling. Marie-Laure Ryan observes: “It was the legacy of French structuralism ... to have emancipated narrative from literature and from fiction, and to have recognized it as a semiotic phenomenon that transcends disciplines and media.”¹¹ In addition to becoming open to multiple kinds of media, then, narratologists also began to dialogue with and appropriate insights from other fields. By 1980, W. J. T. Mitchell could write:

The study of narrative is no longer the province of literary specialists or folklorists borrowing their terms from psychology and linguistics but has now become a positive source of insight for all the branches of human and natural science.¹²

9 Todorov, *Grammaire*, 10.

10 Boris Eichenbaum, “The Theory of the ‘Formal Method,’” in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 99–140, quotation from 103.

11 Marie-Laure Ryan, “Narrative,” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan (Oxford: Routledge Books, 2005), 344–348, quotation from 344.

12 W. J. T. Mitchell, “Foreword,” in *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), vii–x, quotation from ix.

This matured form of narratology hit its stride in the 1980s; in fact, Martin Kreiswirth, in his exploration of the “narrativist turn in the human sciences,” deems the 1980s the “narrativist decade.”¹³

As often happens in human adolescence, narratology’s quest for independence led to probing questions about the foundational assumptions that had been established in earlier phases of development. Indeed, the impetus for narratology’s entrée into adulthood was that theoretical trends like critical theory, cultural studies, and poststructuralism began challenging its most basic premises. As narratology engaged with these insights and critiques, the result was a growing preponderance of “hyphenated and compound narratologies” (e.g., feminist narratology; sociocultural narratology; cognitive narratology; cyberage narratology; econarratology; rhetorical narratology; historical narratology, etc.).¹⁴ By the end of the millennium, narratology had come into its own in literary theory.

Thus it is that in 1999, Herman could announce the discipline’s entry into a distinctly new phase of development, postclassical narratology. Alber and Fludernik have described this retrospectively as postclassical narratology’s *first phase*.¹⁵ Writing in 2010, Alber and Fludernik also suggested that a decade after the publication of Herman’s *Narratologies*, critics were “beginning to see a second phase of postclassical narratology,” one marked by “both consolidation and continued diversification.”¹⁶ The defining task of postclassical narratology’s *second* phase, Alber and Fludernik declare, is:

... to address the question of how these various narratologies overlap and interrelate.... Narratology, to continue our metaphor, in settling down, will now have to align with one another the numerous centrifugal models that arose in the first phase of postclassicism; it will now have to determine how these thematic and contextual inflections of narratology can be linked to the structuralist core in methodologically sound ways.¹⁷

13 Martin Kreiswirth, “Trusting the Tale: The Narrativist Turn in the Human Sciences,” *New Literary History* 23 (1992): 629–627, quotation from 631.

14 Ansgar Nünning, “Narratology or Narratologies? Taking Stock of Recent Developments, Critique, and Modest Proposals for Future Usages of the Term,” in *What is Narratology? Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory*, ed. Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 239–275, quotation from 258.

15 Alber and Fludernik, “Introduction,” 4.

16 Alber and Fludernik, “Introduction,” 4.

17 Alber and Fludernik, “Introduction,” 4.

Indeed, postclassical narratology's current capaciousness is more than evident in the many specialized substrata that fit under its umbrella, some of which cohere with and some of which contradict one another.

The foregoing offered a brief sketch of narratology's development within literary theory, from its early formalist-structuralist roots to its current postclassical configurations. At the risk of oversimplifying, the two most obvious distinguishing features of postclassical narratology today are that it: (1) expands the kinds of narratives in view to include *more than written texts*, and (2) seeks to incorporate multiple kinds of *contexts* into the interpretation of those narratives. More specifically, classical and postclassical narratology differ with respect to their conceptions of language, their methodological approaches, and their disciplinary identities.¹⁸ Let me elaborate each of these distinguishing markers.

First, classical narratology considers language—and therefore, narrative—to operate as a self-sufficient system of symbols that are governed by universal fixed laws, while postclassical narratology conceives of language—and therefore, narrative—as particular, situated, and unfinalizable. Classical narratology was influenced by the famous Saussurean distinction between *langue*, the general system of language, and *parole*, a performed utterance within that system, and the concomitant structuralist conviction that only within the *langue* can an individual *parole* be meaningful: “Language is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others.”¹⁹

Postclassical narratologists, on the other hand, have been influenced by the poststructuralist view that language is marked by disjunctures and polyvalent potentialities, which (as Derrida insisted) radically complicate attempts to reach one final, fixed meaning. Theorists like Foucault, Lacan, and Barthes also emphasize (albeit in different ways) that by virtue of each person's unique positionality, accounts will always be perceived and assessed differently based on an individual's perspective. To cite Herman again:

Increasingly, narrative theorists have focused on the extent to which stories are what they are not because of their form alone, but because of a

18 These are based on Ansgar Nünning, “Towards a Cultural and Historical Narratology: A Survey of Diachronic Approaches, Concepts and Research Projects,” in *Anglistentag 1999 Mainz Proceedings*, ed. Bernhard Reitz and Sigrid Rieuwerts (Trier: WVT, 2000), 345–373, and Nünning, “Narratology or Narratologies?”

19 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Perry Meisel and Haun Saussy, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 114.

complex interplay between narrative form and the contexts of narrative interpretation, broadly construed.²⁰

Postclassical narratology seeks to do justice to the variable contextual aspects of meaning-making such as hermeneutical practices, sociological situatedness, and ideological locations.

Second, it follows from the above premises that classical narratology's indebtedness to literary formalism(s) would lead to a methodological emphasis on "close reading," while postclassical narratology refuses to bracket extra-textual matters such as culture and audience. Close reading is the formalist practice most closely associated with the New Criticism, a movement that rose to prominence (mainly in Britain and the U.S.) following World War II. Much like the French pedagogical *explication de texte*,²¹ close reading requires a slow, scrupulous, synchronic approach that attends to the text's rhyme and rhythm, meter and metrics, tropes and techniques *in isolation from* the circumstances in which the text originated. The New Critics were concerned, as the saying goes, with just "the words on the page." Postclassical narratologists resist such universalizing assumptions in favor of "integration and synthesis."²² They are not unconcerned with "the words on the page," but they insist that interpretation requires attention to the narrative's rhetorical, contextual, and experiential dimensions, as well.

Third, classical narratology is fairly cohesive as a circumscribed discipline (Todorov's "la science du récit"), while postclassical narratology is thoroughly interdisciplinary. Internal variations notwithstanding, classical narratology is relatively monolithic, held together by shared text-focused concerns. Postclassical narratology, on the other hand, "make[s] no claim for a centralizing model," and thus regularly crosses a number of different conventional boundaries.²³ Whereas classical narratology tends to focus narrowly on the "modern novel," postclassical narratology extends across genres (transgeneric narratology) to analyse narrative dimensions of discourses such as drama, poetry, or legal discourse; it extends across media (intermedial narratology) to explore nonverbal forms of narration such as art, music, and digital modes;

20 Herman, "Introduction," 8.

21 In many ways, French narratology represents its own unique form of study. For more, see John Pier, "Is There a French Postclassical Narratology?," in *Current Trends in Narratology*, ed. Greta Olson, Narratologia 27 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 336–367.

22 Herman, "Introduction," 11.

23 Pier, "French Postclassical Narratology?," 341.

and it extends across disciplines to draw on research from fields like history, film studies, the social or cognitive sciences, and so on.

To sum up the distinguishing characteristics of this complex and multifaceted subfield, postclassical narratology differs from classical narratology in its conception of language as unstable and contextually determined, its methodological emphasis on extratextual matters such as culture and audience, and its disregard for traditional disciplinary boundaries. At this point, it is worth reiterating that, just as humans do not actually leave childhood or adolescent bodies behind them as they grow into adulthood, postclassical narratology (despite its “post” prefix) does not leave classical narratology behind to languish in a grave of irrelevance. Ansgar Nünning rightly insists:

[C]lassical narratology and context-sensitive analysis and interpretations of narrative, despite their contrasting theoretical and methodological assumptions, are not as incompatible as is suggested by their respective practitioners.²⁴

Postclassical narratology can be useful for New Testament scholars precisely because it allows us to affirm that, “Narratology’s set of instruments is outstandingly well suited to unpack the *structural* moments, characteristics, and specifics of early Christian gospel narratives,”²⁵ while also acknowledging that the Gospels are *historical* narratives meant to elicit *experiences* in their audiences. Gospel scholars generally assume the latter, but do not always know how to address this narrative dimension theoretically. Postclassical narratology can illuminate the ways in which the Gospels *actually work* to evoke experiences in various contexts, in part through the concept of narrative *experientiality*. Though experientiality is one of the most ubiquitous concepts in contemporary narratology, not all narratologists agree on its definition or usefulness. Let’s linger on this for a bit.

24 Ansgar Nünning, “Surveying Contextualist and Cultural Narratologies: Towards an Outline of Approaches, Concepts and Potentials,” in *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research*, ed. Sandra Heinen and Roy Sommer (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 48–70, quotation from 53.

25 Emphasis added. Ute E. Eisen, “The Narratological Fabric of the Gospels,” in *Narratology Beyond Literary Criticism: Mediality, Disciplinarity*, ed. Jan Christoph Meister (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 195–211, quotation from 195.

Experientiality and Historical Narrative

In 1996, prior to narratology's entry into its first postclassical phase, Fludernik introduced her influential model of "natural' narratology," which is based on the view that narratives *mean* by evoking real-life (i.e. "natural") human experiences. *Experientiality*, according to Fludernik, is thus defined as "the quasi-mimetic evocation of real-life experience" through representations of temporality, embodied intentional actions, and emotions.²⁶ Because Fludernik identifies experientiality (as opposed to plot, for example) as narrative's defining feature, she originally omitted historiography from the category of narrative.²⁷ Unfortunately, this gave credence to the histrionic claims of historians like Geoffrey Elton, whose oft-cited call to arms casts all literary critics as anti-historical:

[I]n battling against people who would subject historical studies to the dictates of literary critics we historians are, in a way, fighting for our lives. Certainly, we are fighting for the lives of innocent young people beset by devilish tempters who claim to offer higher forms of thought and deeper truths and insights—the intellectual equivalent of crack, in fact. Any acceptance of these theories—even the most gentle or modest bow in their direction—can prove fatal ... *Ad fontes* remains the necessary war cry.²⁸

With respect to postclassical narratology (and other literary-critical movements like the New Historicism), Elton's screed is a misdirected caricature. Postclassical narratology is not about "murdering our past" or "killing history."²⁹ I contend that the opposite is true: Postclassical narratology can help us do better justice to what is left to us from the past.³⁰

26 Monika Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 12.

27 Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*, 13.

28 Geoffrey R. Elton, *Return to Essentials: Some Reflections on the Present State of Historical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 41, 52.

29 Lawrence Stone and Gabrielle M. Spiegel, "History and Post-Modernism," *Past & Present* 135 (1992): 189–208, quotation from 208; Keith Windschuttle, *The Killing of History: How Literary Critics and Social Theorists are Murdering our Past* (New York: Free Press, 1997).

30 Fludernik later revised her position in "Experience, Experientiality, and Historical Narrative: A View from Narratology," in *Erfahrung und Geschichte. Historische Sinnbildung im Pränarrativen*, ed. Thiemo Breyer and Daniel Creutz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 40–72, quotation from 50.

Historical narratives give rise to a paradox with respect to temporality and experience.³¹ On the one hand, as Fludernik points out, an “experience of something *as history* ... can only be characterized in contrast or opposition to our contemporary experience”—that is, one can only narrate the past *as such* retrospectively.³² This temporal alterity can be a boon to the historian, since “[h]indsight allows historians to evaluate events in the light of later events and make out links that are still invisible to the historical agents.”³³

On the other hand, casting a narration as historical requires a “configuration of the context which positions the ... events as a functional moment within that configuration.”³⁴ Such a configuration conflates past and present, creating one extended present in which relevance, significance, and consequence seem stable across time. Discussing ancient historiography, classicist Christina Kraus describes this as “the generalizable quality” of ancient narrative *historia*.³⁵

Fludernik’s notion of narrative experientiality turns on the relationships between human experience, *representations* of experience, and *evocations* of experience. The intended or original recipients’ experiences, which are *evoked* by the narrative, can mirror or diverge from the experiences of the characters, which are *represented* in the narrative. This is a salient distinction for Gospel scholars, given that the historical narratives we study were delivered orally, and multiple extratextual factors would have shaped recipients’ evoked experiences. The problem with “excluding other dimensions than the *text*,” as some early New Testament narrative critics did, is that doing so can “make parts of the story invisible”:³⁶

31 Michel de Certeau popularized this notion in *L'écriture de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

32 Fludernik, “Experience,” 44. See also Frank Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

33 Jonas Grethlein, *Experience and Teleology in Ancient Historiography: Futures Past from Herodotus to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3.

34 Fludernik, “Experience,” 46.

35 Christina Kraus, “Historiography and Biography,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies*, ed. Alessandro Barchiesi and Walter Scheidel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 403–419, quotation from 416.

36 Lars-Christer Hydén, “Towards an embodied theory of narrative and storytelling,” in *The Travelling Concepts of Narrative*, ed. Mari Hatavara, Lars-Christer Hydén, Matti Hyvärinen (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2013), 227–44, quotation from 228.

In order to understand these processes, not only must the story as *text* be in focus but also the actual physical and bodily activity of telling the story, including the use of all kinds of semiotic resources.³⁷

Of course, with stories composed and delivered in an ancient oral culture, some of those “semiotic resources” are simply irretrievable. We cannot hear the lector’s tone or cadence when he performs the tale of Luke’s Gospel, nor can we see his gestures or facial expressions; pace and pauses are forever lost to us. Biblical performance critics attempt to imagine and recreate the auditory and visual experiences of original embodied audiences, though these efforts are rarely brought into narratological discussions.³⁸ The concept of experientiality as developed by Fludernik is a salient reminder that all experiences of and reactions to narratives are inescapably embodied, grounded in particular material realities.

Situating experientiality at the center of narrativity is especially *à propos* when it comes to historical narratives like Luke’s, since in the ancient *Weltanschauung*, telling stories could evoke experience by rendering the past present to an implied audience. In the first century BCE, for example, Dionysius of Halicarnassus defined *enargeia* as “the power of bringing what is said before the senses,” such that the audience can “consort with the characters ... as if they were present” (*On Lysias* 7).³⁹ Similarly, Quintilian commends speech by which “images of things absent are represented to the mind, so that we seem to see them with our eyes and have them in our presence” (*Inst. Or.* 6.2.29); by virtue of such representations, he observes, speech can function as a kind of time machine: “We can form a picture not only of things past and present, but also of things future or of what might have been future” (*Inst. Or.* 9.2.41).

With the above narratological developments in mind, let us now turn to our case study from the Gospel of Luke.

37 Hydén, “Towards an embodied theory,” 228.

38 E.g., Whitney Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 2003); David Rhoads, “Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies—Part I,” *BTB* 36 (2006): 118–33; Rhoads, “Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies—Part II,” *BTB* 36 (2006): 164–184; Dan Nässelqvist, *Public Reading in Early Christianity: Lectors, Manuscripts, and Sound in the Oral Delivery of John 1–4* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

39 Stephen Usher, *Dionysius of Halicarnassus: The Critical Essays*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974). See, recently, Rutger J. Allan, Irene J. F. de Jong, and Casper C. de Jonge, “From *Enargeia* to Immersion: The Ancient Roots of a Modern Concept,” *Style* 51 (2017): 34–51.

A Case Study: The “Apocalyptic Discourse” of Luke 21 in Narratological Perspective

Luke 21:5–36, commonly dubbed the “Apocalyptic Discourse” (or sometimes, Luke’s “Little Apocalypse”) recounts Jesus’ last public discourse in the Gospel of Luke (with parallels in Mark 13:1–37; Matt 24:1–25:46). L. Gregory Bloomquist’s description of *apocalyptic discourse* is apt:

Apocalyptic discourse reconfigures our perception of all regions of time and space, in the world and in the body, in light of the conviction that God will intervene to judge at some time in the future.⁴⁰

Moreover, the apocalyptic language in Luke 21 is drawn not only from Luke’s Markan (and perhaps other) sources, but also from common apocalyptic topoi of the time (e.g., impending wars and other calamities; suffering and persecution; final salvation and judgment; cosmic, otherworldly phenomena, etc.). This section of the Lukan narrative reflects an apocalyptic imagination at work.⁴¹

In Luke 21, Jesus is portrayed speaking to “some” (τινων) who are admiring the Jerusalem Temple (v. 5; cf. Mark and Matthew where Jesus addresses his disciples). To the crowd, Jesus’ response would have been shocking: he prophetically foretells not only the destruction of the Temple (vv. 5–19), but the destruction of Jerusalem itself (vv. 20–24), both of which he says will precede the coming of the Son of Man (vv. 25–36).⁴² To us (and most likely to Luke’s late-first-century audience), Jesus’ proclamation is unsurprising; we know that the Romans destroyed the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE (see, e.g., Josephus’ *Ant.* 20.219).

40 L. Gregory Bloomquist, “The Intertexture of Lukan Apocalyptic Discourse,” in *The Intertexture of Apocalyptic Discourse in the New Testament*, ed. Duane Watson (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 45–68, quotation from 45.

41 John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

42 On prophecy and apocalyptic literature, see e.g., John J. Collins, “From Prophecy to Apocalypticism: The Expectation of the End,” in *The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. John J. Collins, vol. 1 of *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, ed. Bernard McGinn, John J. Collins, and Stephen J. Stein (New York: Continuum, 2000), 129–61, esp. 159; and Stephen Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism: The Post-Exilic Social Setting* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

This is why scholars have long looked to Luke 21 as a clue for the historical dating of the Third Gospel. As far back as 1909, Benjamin Bacon wrote that the “The Apocalyptic Chapter of the Synoptic Gospels” represents “the crucial factor for the dating of these writings, a vital question for the history of our faith.”⁴³ Throughout the twentieth century, Lukan scholars sought to parse the exact relationship between Luke and his sources as a way of discerning either: (1) the historical Jesus’ place within salvation history (à la Conzelmann) and/or (2) the historical circumstances of Luke’s composition.⁴⁴ Even previous literary treatments have treated Jesus’ language as reflecting historical circumstance. Noting that apocalyptic discourse often arises as consolation in the face of crises, they have sought to determine whether Luke’s community was in exile or facing literal martyrdom.

A classical narrative-critical reading of Luke 21 shifts our attention to the narrative features and functions of Jesus’ apocalyptic speech in the Gospel itself. How, for example, does the Lukan Apocalyptic Discourse affect the three traditional plot elements of causation, temporality, and teleological purpose? First, Jesus’ dire eschatological warnings underscore the role of divine causality by projecting a sense of inevitability. Of all the canonical Gospels, Luke especially makes use of divine causation in his storytelling.⁴⁵ As Henry Cadbury observed, “There is a necessity about the course which Luke’s story takes, a ‘must,’ to use Luke’s own favorite auxiliary, rather than a mere predicative ‘shall.’”⁴⁶ Indeed, some scholars have argued for a Lukan theology of divine determinism,⁴⁷ and others have described human responses in Luke as “the twitching of human puppets.”⁴⁸ Narratologically, the “plan of God” effectively

43 Benjamin Bacon, “The Apocalyptic Chapter of the Synoptic Gospels,” *JBL* 28 (1909): 1–25.

44 E.g., Lloyd Gaston, “Sondergut und Markus-Stoff in Luk 21,” *ThZ* 16 (1960): 161–172; Josef Zmijewski, *Die Eschatologie-Reden des Lukas-Evangeliums: Eine traditions- und redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Lk 21,5–36 und Lk 17,20–37* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1972); W. Nicol, “Tradition and Redaction in Luke 21,” *Neot* 7 (1973): 61–71.

45 See, e.g., John Squires, *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); François Bovon, *Luke the Theologian: Fifty-Five Years of Research (1950–2005)* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 1–90.

46 Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 303–305. See also Charles Cosgrove, “The Divine *Dei* in Luke-Acts,” *NovT* 26 (1984): 168–190.

47 See, e.g., Siegfried Schulz, “Gottes Vorsehung bei Lukas,” *ZNW* 54 (1963): 104–116. Cf. Bovon, *Luke the Theologian*, 21.

48 Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, trans. Bernard Noble et al. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 362.

generates causation. Whitney Shiner notes that this is a common strategy for unifying episodic and disjunctive ancient plots.⁴⁹

Narrative temporality concerns the narrative's sequence and pace. Luke alone sets Jesus' prophetic oracles sequentially just prior to Judas' betrayal (22:1–6) and the ensuing Passion account (22:7–23:34). In terms of the well-known plot scheme called Freytag's pyramid, then, Jesus is about to experience the narrative climax, his crucifixion.⁵⁰ The fact that his predictions of apocalyptic suffering stand in close proximity to his own impending suffering adds a poignantly proleptic resonance to the scene. Moreover, given the relative scarcity in Luke of the Greek terms most commonly employed in apocalyptic literature to refer to suffering and persecution, this effect is only deepened by Jesus' reference to persecution (*δίωκω*) in 21:12 ("Before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you").⁵¹

The fact that Luke cites Jesus' teachings using direct speech, instead of summarizing them via indirect speech, also slows the pace of the narrative. It is well-known in narratological circles that direct speech (also called direct discourse) slows the speed of the telling (*Erzählzeit*) to the speed of the story event itself (*Erzählte Zeit*);⁵² the amount of direct speech in a scene regulates its tempo and establishes particular points of emphasis. A long speech can slow the pace of the story, enabling a storyteller to extend the length of time it takes to relate especially important scenes. This is precisely what Luke does with the passion narrative, which takes up four whole chapters (19:45–23:56). In comparison with the depiction of Jesus' birth and ministry, which spans the course of over thirty years and multiple geographical locations, the passion and resurrection section of Luke gives us a plodding, telescoped view of Jesus' crucial last days in Jerusalem. With Jesus' long direct discourse in Luke 21, the narrative rhythm decelerates to almost a standstill, and suspense is heightened as the long-anticipated climax is further delayed.

With respect to narrative teleology, as Brooks insists, "Plots are not simply organizing structures, they are also intentional structures, goal-oriented and

49 Whitney Shiner, "Creating Plot in Episodic Narratives: The Life of Aesop and the Gospel of Mark," in *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative*, ed. Ronald F. Hock, J. Bradley Chance, and Judith Perkins (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 155–176, quotation from 167.

50 See Gustav Freytag, *Freytag's Technique of the Drama: An Exposition of Dramatic Composition and Art*, trans. Elias J. MacEwan (Chicago: Griggs, 1894).

51 *δίωκω* only appears two other times (11:49 and 17:23), and *θλιψις/θλίβω* never appears.

52 On "represented" versus "representational" time, see G. Müller, "Die Bedeutung der Zeit in der Erzählkunst," in *Morphologische Poetik: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. Elena Müller (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1968), 247–268.

forward-moving.”⁵³ Luke’s “Little Apocalypse” contributes to the “goal-oriented and forward-moving” Lukan plot by situating Jesus’ story within a larger cosmic narrative, the end of which is also coming. Discussing the ancient historiographic narratives of Herodotus and Polybius, Jonas Grethlein observes: “Inserting an event into a development, especially making it a *telos* to which earlier history leads, helps render it important.”⁵⁴ In Luke’s Gospel, the *telos*, or endpoint, toward which earlier (pre-Lukan) history and the present plot are moving is God’s final victory over evil at the end of time.

As elsewhere in apocalyptic discourse, the suffering to come is portrayed as inevitable, but so will relief be inevitable for those who remain faithful. Echoing previous scriptural traditions (e.g., Deut 32:35; Dan 9:26–27; Jer 21:7, 26:9; Hos 9:7), Jesus implicitly indicates that resolution will come with God’s judgment and vindication; he also explicitly assures his followers of their own promised ending: if they remain alert and persevere (vv. 34–36), their suffering will be temporary (vv. 18–19). In these ways, Jesus’ apocalyptic discourse in Luke 21 contributes to the Gospel’s narrative closure.

At the same time, however, Kermode’s description of narratives as “discordant-concordant wholes” also applies here because none of Jesus’ predictions in this passage comes to pass by the end of the Gospel story.⁵⁵ Jesus tells the disciples that they will be arrested, persecuted, and betrayed by their families and friends (21:12, 16).⁵⁶ He then says that when this happens, they should:

Determine in your hearts not to rehearse ahead of time how to make your defense. For I myself will give you the words along with the wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict (21:14–15, my translation, here and throughout).

Jesus’ followers do not follow these injunctions until the book of Acts (Acts 6:9–12; 21–28), and Jesus’ predictions of Jerusalem’s destruction (21:20–24; 23:28–31) are never fulfilled in the Lukan narrative. The Apocalyptic Discourse thereby contributes, paradoxically, to the sense that by the end of the Gospel, the story has not yet been fully resolved.

This poses a challenge to scholars’ default assumption that Luke’s Gospel is satisfactorily resolved in the end. However, I would argue that this traditional

53 Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 12.

54 Grethlein, *Experience and Teleology*, 309.

55 Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 18.

56 Cf. Luke 12:11–12.

consensus results from a comparative approach, not a narratological one; that is, the view that Luke achieves narrative closure arises from comparing Luke's narrative with Mark's. Richard Horsley makes such comparison explicit when he declares, "In contrast to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, the ending of the narrative itself in Mark is unresolved."⁵⁷ William Kurz argues that Luke noticed "the deliberate Markan gap" and intentionally "chose to fill that gap at the end of his own Gospel."⁵⁸

Traditional New Testament narrative criticism typically seeks to explain (or explain away) inconclusive elements of the story in order to preserve the Lukan narrative's internal coherence. Some scholars, for example, consider the unfulfilled prophecies of Luke's Gospel to be proleptic links to Acts, where many loose ends are tied up.⁵⁹ Others emphasize that unanswered questions draw readers into the story, engaging them as active participants in the meaning-making process.⁶⁰

Postclassical narratology invites us to probe the complications more deeply instead of immediately seeking coherence. Any number of narrative complexities could be discussed at this point; Jesus' speech unites the universal (e.g., pregnant and nursing women) with the specific (e.g., the fall of the Jerusalem Temple), conceals even as it reveals answers, and is marked throughout by tensions between danger and security, terror and courage, destruction and redemption. I focus here on the topic of time.

57 Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 76.

58 William Kurz, *Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 30–31.

59 Mikeal C. Parsons, "Narrative Closure and Openness in the Plot of the Third Gospel," *SBL Seminar Papers 1986* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1986), 201–223. Parsons draws on Marianna Torgovnick, *Closure in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). On the unity of Luke and Acts, the most cited is Tannehill, *Narrative Unity*; other major contributions include Joseph Verheyden, ed., *The Unity of Luke-Acts*, BETL 142 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999); Robert O'Toole, *The Unity of Luke's Theology: An Analysis of Luke-Acts* (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1984); Mikeal C. Parsons and Richard I. Pervo, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); Patricia Walters, *The Assumed Authorial Unity of Luke and Acts: A Reassessment of the Evidence*, SNTSMS 145 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Andrew F. Gregory and C. Kevin Rowe, eds. *Rethinking the Unity and Reception of Luke and Acts* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2010).

60 E.g., Kathy Maxwell, *Hearing Between the Lines: The Audience as Fellow-Worker in Luke-Acts and its Literary Milieu*, LNTS 425 (New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

As noted above, historical narratives paradoxically presuppose a distinction between past and present, while simultaneously collapsing that very distinction in the service of larger ideological aims. The Gospel of Luke, as an historical narrative, can only be narrated *as the past* from a position of non-contemporaneity. That is, the otherness of the past is precisely what enables narration of this moment within Luke's larger *diegesis* about Jesus. Yet, the temporal distance that is necessary for the evangelist to create or discern causal links between events is also effectively negated with respect to the significance of those events. Elizabeth Clark discusses the latter in terms of ideology:

[I]deology naturalizes and universalizes its subjects, ignoring the "historical sedimentation" [Gayatri Spivak's phrase] that situates and individualizes them; it implies that our society's values have no history, but are eternal and natural.⁶¹

The reception history of Luke's Gospel narrative throughout the past twenty centuries obviously attests to the power of this narrational feature insofar as the gospel story and Jesus' apocalyptic warnings within it have been viewed by so many as having "eternal and natural" significance.

In part, the rhetorical force of these temporal complexities is strengthened by the fact (notably outside of authorial control) that the worldwide apocalypse and parousia foretold by Jesus never come to pass outside the storyworld either. The Lukan narrator represents a past event (Jesus taught the crowd), while Jesus' teaching in this scene portrays events that will occur on a cosmic level in the future of the storyworld. Yet, because those foretold events have not yet occurred at the time of the Gospel's telling, they also take on present significance for Luke's implied audience in the real (i.e. "mundane," "historical") time of the first century CE (and, as noted, for many readers throughout the centuries).

Blurred temporal lines complicate the classical narratological dichotomy between story and discourse, as well. Any stark division between the narrated and the narrating becomes problematic when the *telos* toward which the storyworld has been driving becomes the very same *telos* toward which (according to Luke) the extratextual world is also headed. Postclassical narratology's emphasis on experientiality has its advantages here, since it allows for continuity between Jesus' listening audience and Luke's intended recipients without resorting to simplistic notions of referentiality. In other words, the narrative

61 Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 175.

condensing of time and *telos* inextricably yokes the characters' experiences within the story to the listeners' experiences evoked by the Lukan discourse.

If we consider Jesus himself as a narrator in this scene, temporality again comes to the fore, but, in this case, the complexities are circumscribed *within* the Lukan story—i.e. Jesus' proleptic narration of the future.⁶² Prolepsis is a standard feature of apocalyptic discourse, but what has long posed a problem for interpreters is the disjointedness of Jesus' proleptic representations. The issue is this: Jesus does not offer a straightforward answer to the question posed to him ("When will this be ...?" 21:7). Instead, he jumps forward and backward, mixing references to future, past, and present, and oscillating between future warnings and present advice. His response begins with juxtaposed references to the start and end of the coming tribulation: Wars, he says, "must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately" (21:9). Next, he runs through a list of disasters that will occur between those two temporal bookends (21:10–11).

Suddenly, however, Jesus jumps further back to a point *before* the wars (which is especially odd because he had just said the wars "must take place first"):

But *before all these things*, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. (21:12).

Jesus' advice in v. 14 returns to the present (narrated, story) time: "Make up your minds not to prepare your defense" (in Greek, the aorist imperative verb, *θέτετε*, refers to a specific action rather than an ongoing general precept), though notably, the command to decide in the present concerns a future action (i.e., they must decide *now* not to prepare their defense *before* the coming persecutions). The timeline then lurches forward again, as Jesus predicts Jerusalem's fall, the flight from Judea, and the apocalyptic return of the Son of Man in quick succession:

When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, then (*τότε*) know that its desolation has come near. Then (*τότε*) those in Judea must flee ... Then (*τότε*) they will see "the Son of Man coming in a cloud" with power and great glory. (21:20–21, 27).

62 Gérard Genette defines prolepsis as "any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later." *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 40.

Again, Jesus offers advice, here geared toward the time “when these things begin to take place” (21:28). Following a parable about nature’s timing (21:29–31) and a clue that this “future” will occur within their lifetimes (21:32), the end of Luke’s Apocalyptic Discourse returns to the present of the narrated storyworld. Jesus concludes by yet again instructing his listeners how to behave; in this case, he refers to the “here and now” of the storyworld (e.g., “Be on your guard”; “Be alert at all times,” vv. 34–36).

Traditionally, scholars have explained the strange achronological sequencing of this passage by attempting to reconstruct the development of the traditions behind the speech, or by theorizing about Luke’s use of sources (e.g., perhaps Luke simply incorporates sources that depict time differently). I suggest that such efforts are motivated by a fundamental scholarly discomfort with disconnected or incoherent narratives. Even Culpepper identifies the four constitutive elements of plot as sequence, causality, affective power, and *unity*,⁶³ despite the fact that narratologists in the literary sphere tend to discuss sequence, causality, and—in place of unity—the related but distinct notion of teleology. For those who come to a narrative plot seeking unity, Jesus’ narration in Luke 21 may be disturbing. However, this is not the only (and in my view, not the most productive) way to think about the temporal dimensions of Jesus’ narration. Perhaps disturbance is (part of) the point.

Postclassical narratology’s emphasis on experientiality and historical narratives prompts us to ask how Jesus’ disjointed sequencing might have impacted not only his listeners in the storyworld, but also Luke’s listening audience. Culpepper gestures toward the notion of experientiality with his reference to affective power being “the most important feature of [the Gospel of John’s] plot.”⁶⁴ For Culpepper, this means that the narrative is “wooing readers to accept its interpretation of Jesus.”⁶⁵ I suggest that the affective power of Jesus’ apocalyptic speech in Luke 21 is not so much a matter of “wooing” readers, but of disturbing or troubling them. The temporal instabilities of Jesus’ discourse mirror the unpredictability and uncertainty he augurs. The agitated—and, in some sense, disturbing—way in which Jesus narrates his graphic predictions instantiates his claims that chaos is coming. Not only that, but the fact that Jesus’ account of the coming events oscillates between catastrophic references to familial, political, and cosmic upheavals bolsters the sense that no one will escape—the entire world will be disturbed—in the End.

63 Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 80.

64 Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 97.

65 Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 97.

Concluding Thoughts

Following the momentous publication of Culpepper's *Anatomy*, New Testament scholars' appropriations of narratology initially flourished. However, the growth of New Testament narrative criticism effectively stalled in its adolescence; the time has come for the corpus of narratological work on New Testament texts to be revived. In this chapter, I have proposed that postclassical narratology offers one way of breathing new life into this body of scholarship. Of course, whether such interventions will succeed in ushering narratological New Testament study into a new phase of adulthood remains to be seen.

Gospel of John



Jesus, God of Old and Newcomer: Rhetorical Character Presentation in John 1–2

Kasper Bro Larsen

1 Introduction¹

In recent years, Johannine scholarship has witnessed a wave of interest in character and characterization in the Fourth Gospel.² Along with other major currents in contemporary Johannine studies, the wave testifies to the enduring influence of R. Alan Culpepper's *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* of 1983. Culpepper's work was the first comprehensive narratological study of the Gospel of John as literature, and as such it included a separate chapter

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- 1 Previous versions of this article were presented to the Aarhus University-based research project *Homines Novi: Literary Self-Configurations from Cicero and Paul to Augustine* (see <http://nt.au.dk>), to the Emory University New Testament Colloquy, and to the Rhetoric and New Testament Section at the SBL Annual Meeting in San Antonio, Texas (Nov. 2016). The author wishes to thank colleagues at all venues for valuable comments and suggestions.
 - 2 Monographs since about the turn of the millennium include Colleen M. Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel: Gender and Johannine Characterization*, SBLDS 167 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999); Peter Dschulnigg, *Jesus begegnen: Personen und ihre Bedeutung im Johannesevangelium*, Theologie 30 (Münster: LIT, 2002); Stan Harstine, *Moses as a Character in the Fourth Gospel: A Study of Ancient Reading Techniques*, JSNTSup 229 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002); Cornelis Bennema, *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009; 2nd ed., Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014); Susan E. Hylen, *Imperfect Believers: Ambiguous Characters in the Gospel of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009); Alicia D. Myers, *Characterizing Jesus: A Rhetorical Analysis on the Fourth Gospel's Use of Scripture in Its Presentation of Jesus*, JSNTSup 458 (London: T&T Clark, 2012); Christopher W. Skinner, *John and Thomas—Gospels in Conflict? Johannine Characterization and the Thomas Question*, PTMS 115 (Eugene: Pickwick, 2009); Skinner, ed., *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, LNTS 461 (London: T&T Clark, 2013); and Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann, eds., *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, WUNT 314 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013). For more comprehensive research bibliographies, see the editors' introductory chapters in the latter two volumes.

on John's characters.³ *Anatomy* has become a neoclassic: a pioneering work that formulated a scholarly agenda for posterity and invited subsequent scholarship to pick up the exegetical baton. In the theoretical spirit of New Criticism and structuralist narratology, *Anatomy* focused on the composition of the gospel text as a self-contained literary object. Later research into the literary character of the Gospel—if one dare identify a single overarching tendency—has challenged this approach by focusing on the fact that a text as literary object is never interpreted outside a context. Such contexts may be, for example, the ever-changing ideological and material settings of gospel audiences (reader-response criticism, postcolonial criticism, gender criticism, etc.) or the ancient literary conventions of text production and reception (rhetorical criticism, genre criticism, media criticism, etc.). The present article plays into these tendencies and forms a wavelet in the above-mentioned wave of contemporary characterization studies. It is my purpose to draw attention to an overlooked element of John's characterization of Jesus. John was obviously struggling with a circumstance that would constitute a serious impediment to Jesus' authority in an ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman context: Jesus' novelty. In John, Jesus is an apparent newcomer of dubious origin: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (1:46, NRSV here and throughout). Against the accusation of newness, however, and in order to defend what John understood as Jesus' true origin, age, and identity, the evangelist creatively used an already existing repertoire of rhetorical legitimization strategies available for a newcomer or a *homo novus*. On the following pages, I shall focus on the Gospel's presentation of Jesus in chapters 1–2 since, as Culpepper indicated in *Anatomy*, the narrator's way of introducing characters is particularly important to their fashioning.⁴ But before the exegetical discussion, I shall present the underlying discursive problem that John was facing, the general skepticism toward novelty in the Greco-Roman world, and the already available standard solutions to the problem in the rhetoric of newcomers.

2 The Problem of Novelty in Antiquity

From the Jesus movement to the Constantinian turn and beyond, early Christianity faced an inherent challenge: How is a new religious movement to gain authority and intellectual validity in a conservative culture where novelty

3 R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 99–148.

4 Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 106.

is regarded as suspicious and antiquity is taken to be a sign of authenticity? In the modern capitalist world, innovation and novelty are unambiguously positive signifiers that serve to highlight the unique value of a given intellectual or material commodity on the market. The ancient Greco-Roman world, however, and not least imperial Rome, was saturated by a conservative mentality nurtured by the elite classes with a particular interest in maintaining the status quo. Ancient traditionalism found its most pregnant expression in the catchphrase formulated by (Pseudo-)Timaeus of Locri: “The older is better [τὸ πρεσβύτερον κάρρον ἐστὶ]” (*De natura mundi et animae* 94c).⁵ This notion was a cultural truism in the discursive landscape; it represented an example of what philosophers like Plato and Aristotle would call *doxa* or *endoxa*, i.e., common opinion (Plato, *Respublica* 506d; Aristotle, *Topica* 100b22–101a1).⁶ Traditionalist *endoxa* found expression across languages, genres, and social levels. Beside the Romans, also the Greeks cultivated a certain skepticism toward innovations. The most famous example is perhaps the accusation against Socrates of fabricating “new gods [καινοὺς ... θεοὺς] while not believing in the old gods [ἄρχαίους]” (Plato, *Euthyphro* 3b; see also *Apologia* 18c; 24b8–c1; Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.1.1; *Apologia Socratis* 10). The Romans, for their part, took pride in the customs of their ancestors (*mos maiorum*), as stated in the republican poet Ennius’s epitomic formulation: “The Roman state stands due to ancient customs and heroes [*moribus antiquis res stat Romana virisque*]” (Cicero, *De republica* 5.1; Augustine, *De civitate dei* 2.21). Accordingly, Augustus would famously disguise his political reforms and his rise to imperial power as protection of the *mos maiorum* (*Res gestae divi Augusti* 6.1; see also Cassius Dio, *Historiae romanae* 52.36.1–2.). And poets would yearn back for the primordial golden age (Hesiod, *Opera et dies* 109–201; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.89–150). Novelty, on the other hand, was often tainted by suspicion. In 92 BCE, for example, the Roman censors issued an edict against rhetorical education due to its novelty in Rome: “These innovations [*nova*] in the customs and principles of our forefathers [*morem maiorem*] do not please us nor seem proper”

5 Walter Marg, *De natura mundi et animae: Überlieferung, Testimonia, Text und Übersetzung*, PhA 24 (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 120. Unless otherwise stated, ancient Greco-Roman texts are quoted from the original language in the Loeb Classical Library edition, yet in my own English translation.

6 In modern cultural sociology, Pierre Bourdieu has taken up the concept. According to Bourdieu, *doxa* (the culturally given) does not rule out that individual discourses in a given culture may confirm (*orthodoxy*) or criticize (*heterodoxy*) a given *doxa*; but *doxa* is the stage upon which orthodoxies and heterodoxies compete; see Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, CSSCA 16 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977; French edition, 1972), 159–71.

(Suetonius, *De rhetoribus* 1 [Rolfe]). In a Jewish context, Scripture and the tradition of the elders would likewise qualify as ancient authorities. Correspondingly, Josephus would blame novel inventions (ἡ τῶν πατρῶν καίνισις) such as the so-called fourth philosophy of militant Jews for the disasters that afflicted the Jewish people during and after the Jewish War (*Antiquitates judaicae* 18.9; cf. 18.11, 18.23–25 and Deut 32:17; Judg 5:8).

In the Christ movement, the challenge of novelty concerning Jesus and the gospel message goes back at least to Paul (e.g., Rom 1:1–2; 4; Gal 3:15–29; 6:15), but the apologists of the second and third centuries were pioneers in systematizing possible solutions to the problem. Against pagan perceptions of Christianity as an illegitimately “new superstition” (*nova superstitio*; Suetonius, *Nero* 16.2), as a “novel rite” (καίνῃν ... τελετῇν; Lucian, *De morte Peregrini* 11), and as a threat to ancestral customs (according to Celsus in Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.25; 5.33–34), the apologists painted an image of Christianity as a legitimate old-time religion (e.g., Justin, *Apologia* i 23 and, in the fourth century, Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 1.2.1). But it was not only cultural and religious movements, practices, and ideas that were confronted with the challenge of novelty; even individual newcomers like the Johannine Jesus faced a similar challenge to which they responded with certain rhetorical strategies.⁷

3 The *Homo Novus* and His Rhetorical Strategies

One famous newcomer was the Roman rhetorician, politician, and philosopher M. Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE), who described himself as a *homo novus* (“new man”) in spite of the pejorative connotations of the phrase and developed a set of strategies to make a virtue of newness. In Rome, *homo novus* was a designation commonly used of a politician who, despite lacking established aristocratic credentials (*nobilitas*), managed to attain office in the Senate or even become consul as the first in his family. Besides Cicero, other well-known examples were Cato Major (234–149 BCE) and Gaius Marius (157–86 BCE).

7 In spite of the pervasiveness of traditionalism, ideas of technological and scientific development and to a lesser degree moral progress also found occasional expression in the Greco-Roman world from the time of the pre-Socratic Xenophanes (*Fragm.* 16); see Ludwig Edelstein, *The Idea of Progress in Classical Antiquity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967) and Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 10–76. The idea of progress seems to have gained force with the rise of Christianity-cum-salvation-history; see Wolfram Kinzig, *Novitas Christiana: Die Idee des Fortschritts in der Alten Kirche bis Eusebius*, FKG 58 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994).

Homo novus, however, was not a terminus technicus. The phrase was ambiguous and open to rhetorical negotiation and manipulation.⁸ Plutarch would understand the phrase in its broadest sense as simply describing a new arrival striving for public recognition and honor:

The Romans used to call men who had no family distinction, but were coming into public notice through their own achievements, “new men” [εἰωθότων δὲ τῶν Ῥωμαίων τοὺς ἀπὸ γένους μὲν δόξαν οὐκ ἔχοντας, ἀρχομένους δὲ γνωρίζεσθαι δι’ αὐτῶν καινοὺς προσαγορεύειν ἀνθρώπους]

PLUTARCH, *Cato Major* 1.2. [Perrin]⁹

Newcomers like Cicero, but also exponents of new movements and new cultural phenomena, would participate in this negotiation, conscious that they faced an intrinsic challenge of legitimacy. Various strategies were developed. Some would confirm *the older is better* while seeking to take advantage of it for the benefit of the apparent newcomer; others would criticize *the older is better* and formulate exceptions to the rule by ascribing positive value to novelty. For the purpose of analyzing John’s use of strategies in his presentation of Jesus, I shall present a brief catalogue of the newcomer’s seven most common argumentative strategies as they appear in Jewish and Greco-Roman literature.¹⁰

3.1 *The Argument from Antiquity*

The *argument from antiquity* belonged to the first kind of strategy just mentioned. It endorsed *endoxa* (*the older is better*), but claimed antiquity for

8 See, e.g., Cicero, *De officiis* 1.39.138; *Epistulae ad familiares* 5.18.1; *Pro Murena* 16–17; *De republica* 1.1.1; Sallust, *Bellum catilinae* 23; and T. P. Wisemann, *New Men in the Roman Senate: 139 B.C. – A.D. 14*, OCPM (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 1; D.R. Shackleton Bailey, “Nobiles and Novi Reconsidered,” *The American Journal of Philology* 107 (1986): 260; Henriette van der Blom, *Cicero’s Role Models: The Political Strategy of a Newcomer*, OCM (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 35–59.

9 As the quotation from Plutarch shows, the Greek equivalent to *homo novus* was καινός ἄνθρωπος. In early Christian literature, this term was used in a different and distinct manner of Christ as the new Adam (Eph 2:15; 4:24; Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 112.3; cf. 1 Cor 15:45; 2 Cor 5:17; Col 3:10).

10 Examples are taken from a variety of different literatures in antiquity to which the authors of the Fourth Gospel may or may not have been directly exposed. Given the ubiquity of *the older is better* in the ancient world, however, I regard this procedure as legitimate for reconstructing the pool of rhetorical possibilities available to both Johannine and other ancient authors. Needless to say, the seven argumentative strategies in the analysis below are ideal types that sometimes appear in combination in the source material.

individuals, groups, or cultural phenomena that others would regard as new. The claim was substantiated by reference to ancient pedigree. Cicero, for example, put a gloss on his lack of nobility by claiming that all Romans, not the *nobiles* alone, were descendants of the great heroes of the past.¹¹ In Hellenistic-Jewish apologetics the argument became a most prominent *topos* leading to the assertion, for example, that the Greeks derived their wisdom from Moses and that the Hebrew prophets were older than the Greek philosophers (e.g., Aristobulus [Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 13.12.1–4]; Philo, *De specialibus legibus* IV 59–60; Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 1.73–218). As already mentioned, Christian apologists inherited the argument and used it to fight both pagan and Jewish criticism (e.g., Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum* 2.33; 3.1; 3.4; 3.16–28; Justin, *Apologia* i 23; *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 7.1). The argument claimed that whereas Christianity might appear to be new, its tradition is old. It is old wine in new wine skins. And old wine is certainly better; even if the wine skins are new.¹²

3.2 The Argument from Ancient Prophecy

Another strategy to combat the problem of novelty was the *argument from ancient prophecy*: The new is actually better than the old—to the extent that the classical authorities have foretold and thus sanctioned the new. This argument is Janus-faced, containing both a progressive and a traditionalist side. On the progressive side, the argument elevates new phenomena to a high status, thus combating cultural *endoxa* (*the older is better*); but on the traditionalist side, the argument confirms the very same *endoxa* by resting authority on ancient prophecies. In the Judeo-Christian tradition of salvation history this line of argument was pervasive. A couple of examples, if arbitrary, may be the *peshar* commentaries among the Dead Sea Scrolls and the fulfillment citations in the Gospel of Matthew. They all delicately graft innovation onto traditional authority. In the Roman context, an example of ancient divinations legitimizing a societal *novum* is Jupiter's prophecy of Augustus's glorious future reign in Vergil's *Aeneid* 1.286–96 (see also the foretold *nova progenies*

11 For multiple references, see van der Blom, *Cicero's Role Models*, 61–147, 152–58.

12 The *argument from antiquity* first appeared in Greek historians from the 6th and 5th century BCE, who in order to secure the antiquity and nobility of the Greek gods and customs traced the roots of the customs back to ancient Egypt (Herodotus, *Historiae* 2.51.1; 2.143). On the history of the argument, see Peter Pilhofer, *Presbyteron kreiton: Der Altersbeweis der jüdischen und christlichen Apologeten und seine Vorgeschichte*, WUNT 2/39 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Siebeck], 1990).

in Vergil, *Eclogae* 4.7). According to the argument from prophecy new wine is better—but only if prepared in old wine skins.

3.3 *The Exemplum Argument*

The exemplum argument represents a double-faced strategy similar to the previous argument (the *argument from prophecy*): The new may be good in so far as it imitates ancient examples. Henriette van der Blom's 2010 study on Cicero shows how the *exemplum argument* was his primary rhetorical strategy for political advancement. In order to compensate for his *novitas*, Cicero fabricated a public persona in his speeches, not only by means of autobiographical references to his own accomplishments, but by evoking ancient general and personal exempla from Roman history. Cicero claimed to be a follower of these moral-didactic role models of conduct. Throughout his career, Cicero displayed great skill in choosing different role models according to the rhetorical and political situation and appropriating their *auctoritas*. According to Sallust, who probably borrowed a good portion of his rhetoric from Cicero, the military general and *homo novus* Gaius Marius used a similar strategy when casting himself as one of the true imitators of Rome's founding fathers (see *nos illorum* [i.e., *maiorum*] *aemulos* in Sallust, *Bellum jugurthinum* 85.37). New wine is good—if it resembles old wine.

3.4 *The Restoration Argument*

The next argument for novelty occurring in the ancient sources associates novelty with positive restoration. When living organisms grow old, they need restoration in order to regain their original strength. Novelty thus implies freshness, youth, strength, and purity, whereas old age signifies the opposite. Tertullian would phrase the argument in the following way when explaining Marcion's remarkable disposition toward novelty: "Newness gives evidence of a beginning; oldness holds the threat of an ending [*Novitas initium testificatur; vetustas finem comminatur*]" (Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 1.8.3 [PL 2:255b]). Biblical "new creation" and "new covenant" language seems to play into the restoration argument concerning new beginnings. Hebrews 8:13 may serve as an example: "In speaking of 'a new covenant,' he has made the first one obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear [ἐν τῷ λέγειν καινὴν πεπαλαίωκεν τὴν πρώτην· τὸ δὲ παλαιούμενον καὶ γηράσκον ἐγγὺς ἀφανισμοῦ]."¹³ In the Greco-Roman world, the *restoration argument* in

13 See also, e.g., Jer 31:31; Ezek 36:25–27, CD xx, 9–12; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6; 5:17; Gal 6:15; Luke 22:20; Heb 8:8; 9:15; *Ep. Bar.* 5.7. "New covenant" language may also contain a *juridical*

favor of the new appears in ideas of a future return of the golden age (Vergil, *Aen.* 6.790) and of cosmic recreation (following Stoic *ekpyrosis*). Along the same lines, Judeo-Christian apocalypticism envisions eschatological renewal or rejuvenation: “a new heaven [οὐρανὸν καινὸν],” “a new earth [γῆν καινήν],” and “a new Jerusalem [Ἱερουσαλὴμ καινήν]” (Rev 21:1–2; see also 21:5; 4 Ezra 5:55; 2 Bar 44:12). Old wine may become sour. If so, new wine is much better.

3.5 *The Pragmatic Argument*

The following arguments in the catalogue do not derive their positive appraisal of novelty from old authorities, as did the previous arguments more or less, but contest cultural *endoxa* (*the older is better*) in a more radical manner. One such argument was the pragmatic argument. In order to compensate for their ancestral deficiencies and in order to establish a reliable *ethos* for themselves, *homines novi* who managed to climb the ladder of public office (*cursus honorum*) would profess their own personal achievements and moral habitus in their own right. They claimed to be characterized by *virtus* and *industria* as opposed to the arrogant decadence of the *nobiles*.¹⁴ The best example is perhaps once again Gaius Marius’s speech in Sallust. In spite of the opposition of the nobles in the Senate, Gaius Marius had been elected consul in 107 BCE, upon which he defended his *novitas*:

Compare me now, Citizens, a ‘new man’ [*hominem novom*], with those arrogant nobles. What they are accustomed to hear about or read, I have partly seen with my own eyes, in other cases done personally. What they have learned from books I have learned by service in the field. Judge now for yourselves whether words or deeds are worth more. They scorn my lack of pedigree [*novitatem*], I their worthlessness.

BELL. JUG. 85.13–14 [Rolfe]; See also 85.30; PLUTARCH, MARIUS 9¹⁵

In contrast to the notion of *the older is better*, Gaius Marius highlights personal merit and advocates that new wine is better—if it tastes better.

argument relating to the fact that new covenants/testaments and laws may abrogate old ones. See, for example, Justin, *Dial.* 11.2.

14 See, e.g., Cicero, *Rep.* 1.1.1; *Pro Sexto Roscio Amerino* 10; *In Verrem* 2.3.7; *In Pisonem* 2–3; Sallust, *Bell. jug.* 85.37.

15 For further examples, see van der Blom, *Cicero’s Role Models*, 50–59.

3.6 *The Argument from Divine Revelation*

During the first centuries of the Roman Empire, this argument became widespread among religious “freelance experts,” to use Heidi Wendt’s terminology.¹⁶ The argument invoked new divine revelations, claiming that revelation trumps traditions and institutions. Among self-made *homines novi* the argument was seldom in use, but Tacitus recounts how Rufus Curtius, a man of dubious background, would obtain proconsulship in Africa during the reign of emperor Tiberius on the basis of divination from an oracle (Tacitus, *Annales* 11.21). In the itinerant-charismatic Jesus tradition of the Synoptic Gospels there are several examples of claims to radical innovation based on divine authority. In Mark, right after Jesus is publicly identified as “the Holy one of God” and performs his first exorcism (1:24), the people react by praising his novelty: “They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, ‘What is this? A new teaching—with authority [διδαχὴ καινὴ κατ’ ἐξουσίαν]!’” (Mark 1:27; see also 1:22; Matt 5:21–48).¹⁷ Later in Mark, Jesus’ eschatological novelty is made concrete in a series of *chreiai* where he as the divine Son of Man distances himself from Pharisaic tradition. It is in this context that the radical saying already alluded to several times appears: “And no one puts new [νέον] wine into old [παλαιούς] wineskins ... but one puts new [νέον] wine into fresh [καινοὺς] wineskins” (Mark 2:22).¹⁸ As we shall see, the Gospel of John abounds with

16 Heidi Wendt, *At the Temple Gates: The Religion of Freelance Experts in the Early Roman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). See also Martin Hengel’s excursus, “Höhere Weisheit durch Offenbarung als Wesensmerkmal spätantiker Religiosität,” in Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus: Studien zu ihrer Begegnung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Palästinas bis zur Mitte des 2. Jh. v. Chr.*, WUNT 10 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1969), 381–94.

17 The context in Mark indicates that the crowd’s reaction represents their initial positive response to Jesus’ newness, but taken in isolation their outcry is ambiguous and could also betray a conservative view in which “new teaching” and “authority” stand as a contradiction in terms, given that *the older is better*.

18 Matthew adds the following to the quotation from Mark “and so both are preserved” (Matt 9:17), thus possibly seeking to mediate between the old and the new as in Matt 13:52 (and 5:17–20). Luke offers a different addition, almost literally paraphrasing the *older is better*: “And no one after drinking old [παλαιόν] wine desires new [νέον] wine, but says, ‘The old is good [Ὁ παλαιὸς χρηστός ἐστίν]’” (Luke 5:39; see Thom 47). The Lukan saying is probably not a traditionalist correction of the Markan saying, though Luke is certainly fond of old age (see R. S. Good, “Jesus, Protagonist of the Old, in Lk 5:33–39,” *NovT* 25 [1983]: 19–36), but rather an explanation of the Pharisees’ and scribes’ inability to leave traditional halakah behind and embrace the practices of the new bridegroom (see Luke 5:17–6:11). For further discussion, see Anders Eriksson, “The Old is Good: Parables of Patched Garment

examples of the argument from divine revelation. New wine is better if it is wine from heaven.

3.7 *The Philosophical Truth Argument*

The final argument in favor of novelty on our list, sometimes overlapping with the previous argument, appears primarily in philosophical texts. Philosophy concerns the soul seeking truth, and it thus aims to transcend convention, regarding appeal to tradition as a fallacy (see, for example, Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes* 3.28.69). In his epistle *On Philosophy and Pedigrees*, Seneca states: “If there is any good in philosophy, it is this—that it never looks into pedigrees [*stemma*]” (Seneca, *Epistulae morales* 44.1). The nobility acquired through philosophy is of a higher sort, and it does not require antiquity: “Philosophy did not find Plato already a nobleman [*nobilem*]; it made him one” (44.3). In philosophy, new ideas can be an opportunity to accumulate knowledge and reach higher truths. Accordingly, the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers on the Areopagus in Athens were curious to know of Paul’s contribution: “May we know what this new teaching [ἡ καινὴ ... διδασχὴ] is that you are presenting?” (Acts 17:19; see also *καινότερον* in 17:21). New wine is better if it is more genuine and true.

4 John’s Two-Step Presentation of Jesus in John 1–2

Having identified the most prominent ways of dealing with the challenge of novelty in the ancient sources, let us now turn to the Fourth Gospel in order to see how this particular text applies available arguments in its portrait of Jesus as indeed something more than what the Jewish and Roman authorities are able to see: a religious freelancer (7:15) and a political newcomer (19:19–21). All four New Testament gospels wrestled with this rhetorical challenge, but John’s introductory presentation of Jesus (John 1–2) epitomizes what George A. Kennedy has said of the evangelist in general: “[John] uses the forms of logical argument ... as ways of turning and reiterating the topics which are at the core of his message.”¹⁹ One of these topics concerns the Gospel’s main question,

and Wineskins as Elaboration of a Chreia in Luke 5:33–39 about Feasting with Jesus,” in *Rhetoric, Ethic, and Moral Persuasion in Biblical Discourse: Essays from the 2002 Heidelberg Conference*, ed. Thomas H. Olbricht and Anders Eriksson, ESEC 11 (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 52–72.

19 George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*, SR (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 113.

which is also the principal question addressed to any ancient newcomer: the question of his true origin and identity (20:31). This is thematized from the very beginning in the prologue, but often reappears in the narrative in the form of questions addressed to Jesus. I have already quoted Nathanael's exclamation ("Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" [1:46]), but even the very first question that meets Jesus in the entire Gospel regards his origin both in a straight-forward and in a theological sense: "Where are you staying [ποῦ μένεις]?" (1:38). In chapter four, the Samaritan woman asks about Jesus' relation to the old patriarchs: "Are you greater than our ancestor [πατὴρ] Jacob ...?" (4:12). And in the course of the story, it becomes an increasing matter of conflict that the *Ioudaioi* do not know Jesus' ancestry: "Where is your Father?" (8:19; see also 8:14; 9:16; 9:29–30; cf. 7:27; 7:41–42) and: "Are you greater than our father [τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν] Abraham, who died?" (8:53). Finally, in the passion narrative Pilate addresses Jesus as a kind of Jewish *homo novus*: "Where are you from?" (19:9).²⁰ These questions of origin represent an unrelenting test of Jesus, the apparent newcomer. Likewise, Roman *homines novi* were met with suspicion aroused not only by deficient aristocratic ancestry but also their unknown or alien place of origin. Catiline, for example, unfairly discredited Cicero as being "a resident alien in the city of Rome" (Sallust, *Bellum Catilinum* 31.7 [Rolfe]). Origin and identity were inseparable phenomena in the ancient world.

Now, John's rhetorical strategy of presenting and authorizing his apparent newcomer in chapters 1–2 seems to advance in two steps. First, in chapter one, as we shall see in more detail below, the evangelist claims a very old age and origin for Jesus; then, in chapter two (with Jesus' antiquity now safely secured), he presents arguments for positive newness in Jesus. This strategy follows a model of character presentation recommended in the *progymnasmata* and followed by ancient biographers: First, the author presents the origin and pedigree of the main character. (In forensic oratory, this is a means of clearing away negative prejudice against the defendant; see Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 3.14.7 [1415a]). Next follows the author's presentation of the character's morality, deeds, and words culminating in his death and legacy. Aelius Theon described these virtues of characterization in narrative as follows: "The properties of the person are origin, nature, training, disposition, age, fortune, morality, action, speech, (manner of) death, and what followed death" (*Progymnasmata* 78 [Kennedy]). Theon continued:

20 It is also worth considering whether Pilate's ambiguous ἰδοὺ ὁ ἄνθρωπος/*ecce, homo* (19:5) portrays Jesus as a *homo novus* with a claim to political power.

In historical writing it is perhaps appropriate to spin things out and to begin far back ... For example, speaking about Cylon, if one is composing a history of him it is appropriate to say from what ancestors he descended and from what father and mother and many other things ...

PROG. 83 [Kennedy]

Accordingly, a biographer struggling with the problem of newness would have to first defend his main character's origin (using the above-mentioned *argument from antiquity*) and then his morality in deeds, words, and manner of death (using the *pragmatic argument* and other arguments). This two-step advance in character presentation was practiced by several authors of *bioi/vitae*. In Philo's Moses biography, for example, Philo first safeguards Moses' pedigree by describing his seventh-generation descent from Abraham (*De vita Mosi* 1 5–7); then he presents Moses' novelty as the messenger of a "new Lord [καίνον κύριον]" (88). Likewise, Josephus in his autobiography first presents his ancient and noble bloodline (*Vita* 1–6) and then his education and character (7–12) before turning to his arrival as a newcomer in Rome (13–16). The synoptic evangelists followed the same pattern. Mark might be the weaker example, but he does summon Isaiah's ancient testimony and Jesus' origin with John the Baptist (Mark 1:1–8) before presenting Jesus' newness (1:15, 22). Matthew and Luke, however, clearly advance according to the progymnastic pattern. Matthew opens his story by linking Jesus to ancient father Abraham by means of genealogy (1:1–17) and later, in the Sermon on the Mount, introduces Jesus' newness (5:21–48), Luke situates Jesus' birth in a traditional, Septuagintal world (Luke 1–2) and accounts for his family lineage (3:23–38) before turning toward the new fulfillment of prophecy in the programmatic scene in the synagogue in Nazareth (4:21). In chapter 1–2 of his gospel, John participates in the same literary conventions of character presentation.²¹

4.1 *John 1: Jesus as God of Old*

Let us observe how John's narrational argument develops in more detail. In the first chapter, the evangelist affirms cultural *endoxa* (*the older is better*) by

21 For further examples of the pattern in ancient *bioi/vitae* and *encomium*, see Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Greco-Roman Biography*, 2nd ed., BRS (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004; First edition: 1992), 132–33, 141–42; Michael W. Martin, "Progymnastic Topic Lists: A Compositional Template for Luke and Other *Bioi*?" *NTS* 58 (2008): 18–41; and Jerome H. Neyrey, "Encomium vs. Vituperation: Contrasting Portraits of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel," in Neyrey, *The Gospel of John in Cultural and Rhetorical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 3–28.

building Jesus' authority upon his preexistence and claiming that his identity as a newcomer is only superficial. The fact that the newcomer's challenge is an essential problem to the evangelist becomes evident by his repetitive use of John the Baptist as witness to Jesus' old age: "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me [Ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν, ὅτι πρῶτός μου ἦν]" (1:15; almost identically reiterated in 1:30). Although Jesus begins his ministry *after* John the Baptist and thus may appear to be the Baptist's successor, Jesus is in reality his predecessor. The Baptist, in other words, confirms *the older is better* and employs the *argument from antiquity* to secure Jesus' authority. This is also one of the main functions of the Johannine prologue (1:1–18). Jesus is a preexistent divine being, the *logos*, much like quasi-divine Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24. Jesus was "in the beginning [ἐν ἀρχῇ]" (1:1–2; see also 6:62; 17:5, 24), which, as we know, indicates both temporal priority and superior status. Quintilian agreed: "Even gods may derive honour from their descent, as for instance is the case with the sons of Jupiter, or from their antiquity [*antiquitas*], as in the case of the children of Chaos" (*Institutio oratoria* 3.7.8; see also 3.7.26 [Butler]).

According to Peter Pilhofer, Christian writings from the first century did not thematize the problem of novelty to the same extent as the later apologists: "Die ‚christliche Urliteratur‘ weist jedenfalls keinen ausgeführten Altersbeweis auf."²² This may be true in a technical sense, but in the Fourth Gospel the notion of Jesus' preexistence is certainly an argument from antiquity in the narrational mode. As mentioned above, the narrational argument from antiquity was already used by Matthew and Luke in their birth narratives when they linked Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee to the Judean line of King David of Bethlehem. The Fourth Evangelist, however, was unaware of or at least refrained from directly using the Bethlehem tradition as an argument in favor of Jesus' Messianic identity (7:41–42). Instead, he brought the argument from antiquity to its extreme by means of his preexistent *logos* Christology.²³

²² Pilhofer, *Presbyteron kreitton*, 7 n. 28.

²³ John picked up a delicate task equivalent to the task described by Peter Pilhofer: "Für einen *homo ... novus* einen Altersbeweis zu führen muß schwerfallen. Dies kann nur dann gelingen, wenn zuvor alle Spuren der *novitas* verwischt sind ..." (*Presbyteron kreitton*, 302–303). An obvious objection to the evangelist's claim concerning Jesus' old age is why Jesus, if he existed from the very beginning of creation, did not reveal himself at an earlier point in history. In the history of the early church, this objection later became a recurrent motif in anti-Christian polemics (see Origen, *Cels.* 4.6). John's prologue perhaps addresses the objection when claiming that the *logos* did in fact appear to humans before the incarnation as "the light of all people" (1:4), but "the world did not know him" (1:10; see also 1:3–5).

As mentioned, in the evangelist's first introduction of Jesus in chapter one, it is a strategy not to question the cultural *endoxa* of *the older is better*. Rather, he affirms it and claims that Jesus Christ, the *logos*, antedates all other religious authorities. Later in the Gospel this claim is further specified when Jesus is said to be older than not only the Baptist, but also Isaiah, who saw Christ's glory (12:41), and Abraham: "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am [πρὶν Ἀβραάμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί]" (8:58). This ἐγὼ εἰμί saying is practically untranslatable, as it combines the aorist infinitive and the durative present indicative, the latter indicating that the saying together with other ἐγὼ εἰμί sayings in the Gospel serves, among other functions, to express Jesus' eternal existence.²⁴ Jesus is not only a God of old, but transcends the temporal old/new dichotomy. For this reason, attempts at reading the prologue as a linear salvation-historical narrative run into difficulties regarding, for example, the identification of the exact moment of revelation or incarnation (1:5, 9, 10, or 14). The epistemological dichotomies of the prologue (light/darkness, truth/not-knowing) rather describe transtemporal realities as in, for example, the durative present-tense statement in 1:5a: "The light shines [φαίνει] in the darkness." Jesus as the revealer of light and truth is authorized not only by his preexistence but by his epistemological superiority (see τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν and ἀλήθεια in 1:9, 14, 17). John thus employs the newcomer's *philosophical truth argument*, where truth outbids tradition along with his argument from antiquity. The philosophical argument is used, for example, in the dialogue with the Samaritan woman, where Jesus, in contrast to the ancestors' locative mode of worship (see οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν in 4:20), announces the advent of a new hour of worship "in spirit and truth [ἀληθείᾳ]" (4:23–24), but it appears most prominently in chapter eight in the controversy with the *Ioudaioi* over pedigrees ("We are descendants [σπέρμα] of Abraham," in 8:33; see also 8:31–47; 18:37) versus truth ("I tell the truth [τὴν ἀλήθειαν]"; 8:45). In John, apparently, the conservative argument from antiquity blends into a philosophical truth argument concerning epistemological status. Jesus' authority is not only a matter of old wine, but, as it were, the true vine.

4.2 *John 2: Jesus as Newcomer*

Addressing Jesus' novelty with the philosophical truth argument (Jesus is time-transcending truth) and the argument from antiquity (Jesus is ancient) are not John's only strategies when establishing Jesus' *ethos* as a newcomer. After all, as we saw in the Baptist's proclamations, the evangelist cannot and does not

24 Jörg Frey, *Die johanneische Eschatologie: Band II. Das johanneische Zeitverständnis*, WUNT 110 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 86–89.

reject the notion that Jesus-in-flesh is a recent appearance in the history of salvation (1:15, 30). The prologue concurs: “The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (1:17). In chapter two, the evangelist thus moves to the second step in his character presentation, and the argument from antiquity, which dominated the first chapter, is supplemented by additional arguments from the rhetorical catalogue. This transition was already prepared for in the first chapter, which is a preparatory chapter to Jesus’ public ministry that builds to a crescendo in Jesus’ short dialogue with Nathanael: “You will see greater things than these” (1:50). The statement apparently hints at the deeds that Jesus will perform, not only in the subsequent chapter but in the entire narrative, thus evoking the *pragmatic argument* (Jesus does good deeds). According to Aristotle, pragmatic arguments are particularly convincing in *encomium* or praise of a person, which was a mode of rhetoric also prevalent in ancient *bioi*. *Encomium* “deals with achievements [τῶν ἔργων]—all attendant circumstances, such as noble birth [εὐγένεια] and education, merely conduce to persuasion” (*Rhet.* 1.9.33 [1367b; Freese]; see also 1.2.4 [1356a]). In the course of John’s narrative, Jesus’ achievements or signs will serve to reveal Jesus’ true identity and display his legitimacy as a newcomer. This can already be seen in the disciples’ affirmative reaction to the wine miracle: “Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him” (2:11). As Jesus states later in the Gospel by means of yet another pragmatic argument, his lineage to the Father can be grasped through his actions: “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves” (14:11; see also 5:36).

After his promise to Nathanael in 1:50–51, Jesus in chapter two moves into action as he performs his first signs at the wedding at Cana in Galilee and on the temple mount in Jerusalem.²⁵ Both scenes are paradigmatic to Jesus’ entire ministry and serve as programmatic scenes (comparable to Mark 1:14–15, 21–28; Matt 5–7; Luke 4:16–30). The story of the wine miracle at the wedding at Cana, which from the very outset thematizes the question of right timing (“My hour [ῥα] has not yet come”; 2:4), addresses the topic of the old and the new in a different way. When Jesus decides to go into action, the wine steward—a *connoisseur* of vintage wines, we must presume—serves as a highly appropriate character to express the cultural *endoxa* of *the older is better*. Even

25 The conventional exclusion of the temple incident (2:13–23) from the series of Johannine signs on the grounds that it is not a miracle and that it disturbs the enumeration in 4:54 is not very convincing. If included in the series, the mention of “signs” in the plural in 2:23 makes better sense.

ancient sommeliers knew that mature and old wine can develop a complexity that cannot be found in a fresh wine from last year; the old must therefore be served first (e.g., Catullus, *Carminae* 27; Petronius, *Satyricon* 34). The fact that timing is in focus in the story becomes evident when the evangelist, in his description of the steward's reaction to the miracle, only in passing mentions the marvelous conversion of water into wine ("When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, ..." [2:9]). Instead, the story centers on the steward's great astonishment concerning the reversal of conventions:

Everyone serves the good wine first [πρώτον τὸν καλὸν οἶνον], and then the inferior [τὸν ἐλάσσων] wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now [σὺ τετῆρηκας τὸν καλὸν οἶνον ἕως ἄρτι] (2:10).

Jesus' wine miracle, in other words, overturns the expected order between good old wine and inferior new wine so that the good old wine comes last. The steward endorses *endoxa* by confirming that the old is better, and the story does not question that, but at the same time the miracle challenges *endoxa* by showing how the old and good, in spite of its old age, may not be revealed until very late. The wedding at Cana thus presents Jesus in the form of a paradox: He is both old and new.²⁶ As regards the newcomer's reservoir of defensive arguments, the story first of all induces the pragmatic argument, but the *argument from divine revelation* is also in play (as already in 1:33–34). At the beginning of the story, Jesus emphasizes his own divine initiative by distancing himself from his mother as representative of human agency (2:4); and it is Jesus' divine glory that the disciples confirm in reaction to the miracle (2:11). As divine revealer, Jesus can decide the right timing of the hour. As divine revealer, he is both old and new.

The second scene in chapter two, the temple incident, continues to challenge a straight-forward nostalgia concerning *the older is better*—this time, however, not so much in the characters' explicit dialogue as in the action of the story. Jesus visits Jerusalem for the first time. He is an outsider and a newcomer arriving from Galilee but right away begins to clear the temple court violently and thus acts as a threat to well-established traditions and institutions. The *Ioudaioi* immediately ask for Jesus' legitimacy: "What sign can you show us for doing this?" (2:18). They are, in other words, asking for a pragmatic argument that justifies the newcomer's attack on the old temple. Jesus' answer does

26 Compare to Cato Major's paradoxical identity: "But he himself used to say that as far as office and distinction went, he was indeed new [καινός], but having regard to ancestral [προγόνων] deeds of valour, was oldest of the old [παμπάλαιος]" (Plutarch, *Cat. Maj.* 1.2).

not invoke the argument from antiquity emphasized in John 1 (for example by claiming “Before the temple was, I am”) but, not unlike the story of the wedding at Cana, points toward the culmination of the gospel narrative: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (2:19; see 2:1). It is a pragmatic argument that refers to Jesus’ ultimate sign, his resurrection from the dead. Jesus will become a new temple that supersedes the old temple; he is the true dwelling place of God’s glory (2:20; see also, e.g., 1:18; 2:11; 4:20–24).

The most important arguments for Jesus’ authority in John 2 seem to be pragmatic ones, relating to Jesus’ signs. But the temple incident may also evoke Jewish language of temple renewal, purification, and rededication (“Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” [2:16]), and it thus plays into the *restoration argument* from the newcomer’s inventory. Also, the *argument from ancient prophecy* is present in this passage. In vv. 17 and 22, the disciples find that Scripture warrants Jesus’ temple action and his resurrection (and vice versa). Jesus is, in other words, legitimized by ancient authorities, adduced as witnesses in his favor. As we have seen, Roman *homines novi* would likewise seek ancestral authority (*auctoritas maiorum*). Later in John’s Gospel, the apparent newcomer’s appeal to ancient authorities such as the Father, Scripture, and Moses becomes a central point of controversy (5:31–47; 8:12–20).²⁷ The same can be said of the question whether Jesus appears of his own accord or not (5:30; 7:17, 28; 8:28, 42; 12:49; 14:10)—a standard accusation against the newcomer.²⁸ Along with the argument from prophecy, the Johannine Jesus would defend himself by means of ancient exempla that he claimed to imitate, comparable to what we have already seen in Cicero (the *exemplum argument*). In order for such exempla to work, they must of course have authority (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.9.38 [1368a]; Cicero, *Verr.* 2.3.209–22; Theon, *Prog.* 111–113). In John, Moses is an indispensable authoritative exemplum as can be seen, for instance, in the feeding of the five thousand (6:14, 32, 57), where Jesus not only imitates the exemplum but surpasses him. The same is the case in the rhetorical *synkrisis* (comparison) of Moses and Jesus Christ in 1:17.²⁹ Jesus’ most important exemplum in John, however, is God himself: “For whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise” (5:19; see 5:19–30; 12:49–50). Jesus is much more than a Galilean upstart since he acts in continuance with the life-giving creator: “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” (5:17).

27 See the rhetorical analysis in Myers, *Characterizing Jesus*, 97–104, 112–20.

28 Unlike Jesus, some *homines novi* would take pride in being a self-made man (see the phrase *ab se gigni* in Cicero, *Verr.* 2.5.180).

29 On *synkrisis* in John’s Gospel as a rhetorical means of characterizing Jesus in relation to ancient exempla, see Neyrey, “Encomium,” 12, 22–23, and Myers, *Characterizing Jesus*, e.g., 47–49 and 68–70.

In Johannine statements like this, the exemplum argument is taken to a limit where one can hardly distinguish between the exemplum (the Father) and the follower (the Son). Once again, Jesus is both a newcomer and a God of old (1:1; 10:30, 33, 38; 14:8–11; 20:28).

5 Conclusion

The Gospel of John wrestles with a problem of persuasion: How can Jesus, an apparent newcomer to both Jewish and Roman authorities, gain authority in a context where *the older is better* is a cultural given? The first chapters of the Gospel testify to the problem and to how the evangelist employed contemporary rhetorical strategies to approach it. In the first chapter, the evangelist affirms *the older is better* by building Jesus' authority upon the claim that his status as a newcomer is only apparent. In reality, Jesus is the preexistent *logos* and John the Baptist's predecessor: "He who comes after me ... was before me" (1:15, 30). At the wedding at Cana and the temple incident in chapter two, however, the evangelist attempts a reverse strategy. He now subverts *the older is better* by asserting that novelty may in fact in some respects contain positive connotations as expressed in, for example, the steward's remark at the wedding: "You have kept the good wine until now" (2:10). In John 1–2, this dual strategy of confirmation and subversion of a cultural given serves the common purpose of establishing Jesus' *ethos* for an ancient audience that would take *the older is better* for granted. John 1–2 thus cultivates the soil for John's further characterization of Jesus in the gospel narrative, and it becomes evident that Jesus in his capacity as "the truth" transcends the old and the new (8:58) and, moreover, resembles his exemplum (the Father) to an extent that other newcomers would not dare to claim (10:30).

In continuance of the investigation above, it appears that the understanding of Jesus as both a rightful God of old and a legitimate newcomer did not only have Christological significance in the eyes of the Johannine community but also affected its ecclesiological self-understanding as a community of de facto newcomers in Jewish tradition. In John's gospel narrative, the community gives expression to a kind of argument from "antiquity" in its idealized portrayal of its apparent founder, the Beloved Disciple (19:35; 21:23–24). He was the first of the disciples to reach Jesus' empty tomb (20:4, 8), the first to believe in the resurrection (20:8), the first to recognize Jesus by the Sea of Tiberias (21:7); and, if he is identical with the anonymous disciple in 1:35–40, even the first disciple to follow Jesus. Yet, not only the community founder but also community membership and traditions were legitimized by means of arguments

from antiquity, both in the Gospel of John and the Johannine Epistles. In contrast to the *Ioudaioi*, who wrongfully claimed to be descendants and emulators of Abraham (8:31–47), the Johannine Christ-believers were the children of God, belonging to Christ (1:12; 11:52; 12:36; 13:33; 21:5), who was much older than Abraham (8:58). Moreover, Jesus was the exemplum for Christ-believers to imitate (see ὑπόδειγμα in 13:15). This was his “new commandment [ἐντολὴν καινὴν]” to the disciples (John 13:34; 15:12, 17). In the Johannine community, however, the new commandment apparently became tradition or a teaching “from the beginning [ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς]” as repeatedly emphasized in the Johannine epistles (1 John 1:1; 2:7–8, 13–14, 24; 3:11; 2 John 5–6). The paraenesis in 2 John 5 thus seems to articulate an emerging traditionalist notion of *the older is better* in the Johannine community: “But now, dear lady, I ask you, not as though I were writing you a new commandment [ἐντολὴν ... καινὴν], but one we have had from the beginning [ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς], let us love one another.”³⁰

30 The interpretation of the history of the Johannine tradition in the final paragraph brings us back to a beginning. It aligns with R. Alan Culpepper’s investigation of the Johannine community or “school” in his doctoral dissertation, *The Johannine School: An Evaluation of the Johannine-School Hypothesis Based on an Investigation of the Nature of Ancient Schools*, SBLDS 26 (Missoula: Scholars, 1975), 264–70, 281–82.

Stereotypes, In-Groups, and Out-Groups in the Gospel of John

Jan G. van der Watt

In his groundbreaking work, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*,¹ Alan Culpepper indeed succeeded in changing and influencing Johannine research decisively. He illustrated the relevance of narrative criticism for analyzing the Gospel, and also underlined the significance of characters in the development of the plot. It is, however, his own character and personality that has had equal impact on the Johannine guild. His openness that invites discussion, his calm and wise demeanor that leads one back to careful considerations of the text without feeling threatened when differences occur, his knowledge and insight into Johannine research enabling him to distinguish between the probable and improbable, the plausible and the implausible—these qualities enrich everyone in every discussion in which he participates.

An especially distinctive characteristic of Alan's is his openness to others and his sensitivity specifically to the vital role that Jewish studies must play within New Testament scholarship. This is evident in the care he takes in formulating his position towards the Jewish religion in several of his articles. Whether one agrees or disagrees with him, the formulation of his position is clear and well argued—trademarks of an exceptional scholar. Within this framework of openness to others, this essay considers central aspects of John's stance towards other people and groups, specifically focusing on *stereotypes* in John as well as his treatment of some *in-groups* and *out-groups*.²

¹ R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

² Due to the complex nature of who “the Jews” or “the Judeans” are in John, this issue will not be treated here. See, however, J. G. van der Watt, “Is Jesus the King of Israel? Reflections on the Jewish Nature of the Gospel of John,” in *John and Judaism*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and Paul N. Anderson, Resources for Biblical Study 87 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 39–56.

1 Jesus and Stereotyping in John

1.1 What is Stereotyping?

Stereotyping was instrumental in making sense of social realities in ancient times. Stereotyping may be described as the identification of groups based on rather rigid general characteristics attributed by association to those groups.³ According to Kurylo, four themes recur in definitions of stereotyping, namely: “*cognitive structures and representations that are rigid yet functional for those who use them.*”⁴

In ancient societies that were more collective and group orientated,⁵ stereotyping played an important role in “mapping” societies in relation to space, gender, generation, abilities, social rank, origin, and so on. Stereotypes of others were usually shared by members of the same in-group based on what they regarded as being common of various out-groups.⁶ They functioned as a sort of “cognitive map,” working with general categories into which people are classified.⁷ The complexity of groups within society was simplified, thus providing images of society that assisted in negotiating everyday life.⁸ People tended to preserve these stereotyped schemas and used them to process information quickly, sometimes unreflectively.⁹ According to these stereotypes, people are judged, positively or negatively, as normal or abnormal, able or disable, acceptable or not, and so on, determining the behavior of the in-group towards the out-group.¹⁰ Stereotypes were usually rigid and therefore required maintenance; in other words, fixed stereotypes required ongoing assertion and reaffirmation.¹¹

3 Anastacia Kurylo, *The Communicated Stereotype* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 3.

4 Kurylo, *Stereotype*, 4, my emphasis.

5 Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 153–57.

6 Malina and Neyrey, *Portraits*, 169, remark: “Persons socialized into group-orientated societies invariably make sense of other people by assessing them ‘sociologically.’”

7 Malina and Neyrey, *Portraits*, 169–70.

8 Kurylo, *Stereotype*, 4.

9 Kurylo, *Stereotype*, 4.

10 A well-known example of stereotyping (see also Malina and Neyrey, *Portraits*, 171) is found in Aristotle (*Pol.* 7.6.1–2, 1327b), where he describes the nations from the cold places as full of spirit but not so intelligent. The people from Asia do not have spirit but do have intelligence, and the Greeks have both spirit and intelligence. This, of course, impacts behavior and how others are treated.

11 Kurylo, *Stereotype*, 9, discussing different views in this regard.

Stereotyping covered the broad spectrum of society. Physical events like birth, heritage, geographical location, and health were included, but so were attitudinal political aspirations. Attitudes towards self, life, and virtues were also among the important aspects stereotyped.¹²

1.2 *Stereotyping in John*¹³

In John's narrative, the social convention of stereotyping is also evident. The first clearly non-Jewish person that Jesus meets is the Samaritan woman (ch. 4). Since stereotypes abound in this narrative, it serves as a basis for discussing stereotyping in John.¹⁴ At least two stereotypes immediately come into play on the surface level. In 4:9, "The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common [συγχρῶνται¹⁵] with Samaritans)".¹⁶

a) The first stereotype is thus one of *ethnic difference*: namely, Jew versus Samaritan.¹⁷ From a Jewish perspective, the Samaritan woman is an "ethnic

12 Malina and Neyrey, *Portraits*, 176.

13 "John" is used as a convenient way to refer to the Gospel or to the author, depending on the context.

14 Culpepper does not deal with stereotyping of characters in *Anatomy*, but in his *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Abingdon: Nashville, 1998), he uses the phrase "powerful social conventions" (140) to describe what is treated in this essay as an aspect of stereotyping. He points out that John's Jesus sets these conventions aside.

15 Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 180–81, notes that συγχρῶνται is a technical word that came into use in 65/66 AD and could not have been used by Jesus, but was evidently known by John. Lindars concludes that the word most probably refers to not eating and drinking with Samaritans, treating them as Gentiles.

16 The last part of this verse has several text-critical problems, as Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament*, 4th revsd. ed. (London, New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 177, explains:

This explanatory comment is omitted in several witnesses (Σ* D it^a b. d. e. j cop^{lay}). Although some have thought (cf. F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961], § 193, 5) that the words reflect an early marginal gloss that eventually got into the text of most witnesses, such comments are typical of the evangelist. The omission, if not accidental, may reflect a scribal opinion that the statement is not literally exact and therefore should be deleted.

See C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John* (London: SPCK, 1978), 232.

17 An insightful discussion about the relation between and stereotyping of Jews and Samaritans is given by Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 2 vols. (Peabody: Baker, 2003), 599–601. See also Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, Vol. 1 (London:

outsider with whom all commerce by Judeans was prohibited,"¹⁸ while the Samaritan woman stereotypically references Jesus as "a Jew." However, in the exchange between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, it becomes evident that ethnicity does not limit Jesus' interaction with the woman. Jesus approaches her openly and personally.

Closely related are signs of stereotypical differences among the Jews themselves. Judeans held certain opinions of the Galileans, as is apparent in the derogatory remark of Nathanael (1:46), asking whether anything good can come out of Nazareth, or the Pharisees who reprimanded Nicodemus for thinking that a prophet could come from Galilee (7:52). In this way, stereotypes seem to have determined the social pecking order within Jewish society.

b) The second is a *gender*¹⁹ stereotype: man versus woman (see also 4:27).²⁰ Keener explains that such conversation between a man and woman could have sexual overtones and was socially not expected.²¹ These stereotypes functioned to disallow communication and contact, perhaps protecting the woman. Again, from Jesus' perspective, this stereotype does not play a role in his exchange with the woman, although the implied reader is made aware of it.

This negation of gender stereotyping is also confirmed in the rest of John by the central and even unexpected roles played by women.²² Thus, important

Chapman, 1971), 170; Werner de Boor, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, 1. Teil (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus Verlag, 1985), 132–33, for background information about the origin and nature of the Samaritans.

18 Jerome. H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 94.

19 The word gender is used to distinguish between sexes (man and woman) and not in the sense of sexual orientation.

20 Keener, *Gospel*, 596–97, emphasizes that, according to Jewish expectations, it was unbecoming for a man, especially a scholar, to converse with a woman. Brown, *Gospel*, 173, refers to *Pirqe Aboth* i.5 and *TalBab 'Erubin* 53b in this regard. This was a fixed stereotype. Johns Varghese, *The Imagery of Love in the Gospel of John* (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2009), 121–22, also notes the presence of masculinity and femininity in this passage.

21 Keener, *Gospel*, 596–97. Scholars like Mark W. G. Stibbe, *John* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 68–69; Varghese, *Imagery*, 134–40; and J. E. Botha, *Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1–42*, *NovTSup* 65 (Leiden: Brill, 1991) interpret the Samaritan woman as a betrothal scene, although Brown, *Gospel*, 171, is skeptical about such a possibility. If a betrothal scene is suggested, it might be asked whether Jesus ignores the marriage restrictions regarding foreign people as is expressed in *Ezra* 10:10–11 and other places.

22 See, for instance, Adele Reinhartz, "From Narrative to History: The Resurrection of Mary and Martha," in "Woman Like This": *New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. A.-J. Levine (Atlanta: Scholars, 1991), 161–84; Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, "Mary of Bethany and Mary of Magdala—Two Female Characters in the Johannine Passion

roles women play in John include: witnessing to Jesus (the Samaritan woman and Mary at the grave), confessing Jesus (Martha),²³ and anointing his feet (her sister, Mary).²⁴ Hays notes that John follows an egalitarian approach by not giving women subordinate roles in the life of the group.²⁵

c) A *religious* stereotype is also touched on in the discussion between Jesus and the woman (4:20–22), with Jews/Jerusalem versus Samaritans/Gerizim. Different worshipping practices are here stereotyped, which might include historical views of the Jews that Samaritans are sinful, since they did not repent in response to Jeremiah's call.²⁶ Jesus uses the plural, referring to the worshipping of Samaritans and Jews, implying that the Samaritan woman is a religious representative of the Samaritan people, as he is of the Jewish people.²⁷ The outcome of this discussion is that both stereotypes will become redundant when God is worshipped in spirit and in truth.

d) *Moral* stereotyping is also implied by the reference to the marital status of the woman.²⁸ The fact that the woman comes alone²⁹ and at the sixth hour³⁰ might imply that the woman is not welcome among others, perhaps for moral reasons. Keener argues strongly, citing several examples, that the woman was of dubious moral status, and that this was known by the townspeople (4:29).³¹ It was also expected by Jewish teachers that social contact with "those practicing overtly sinful lifestyles" should be avoided.

Narrative: A Feminist, Narrative-Critical Reader-Response," *NTS* 41 (1995): 571–78; Gail R. O'Day, "Martha: Seeing the Glory of God," *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 487–503, even calls Martha "the reader's guide into the narrative."

23 See Jamie Clark-Soles, "Mary Magdalene: Beginning at the End," *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel*, 626–40.; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM, 1983), 330–31.

24 See Susan Miller, "Mary (of Bethany): The Anointer of the Suffering Messiah," *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel*, 473–86.

25 Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 155.

26 Keener, *Gospel*, 599.

27 Varghese, *Imagery*, 129.

28 John 4:16–19; Neyrey, *Gospel*, 95.

29 Keener, *Gospel*, 591, notes that women came together to draw water; coming alone warrants attention.

30 The sixth hour refers to either 12:00 noon or 6:00 pm, with preference for the first; see Keener, *Gospel*, 591–93.

31 Keener, *Gospel*, 593–96.

e) Keener also mentions the possibility of *cultic* stereotyping.³² Within rabbinic thought, Samaritan women were regarded as unclean.³³ If this stereotype was widespread in early Judaism, the reference to the Samaritan woman might be a reference to cultic impurity.³⁴ Some reports say that if a Samaritan woman was in a town, all the spittle in the town should be regarded as unclean, since it might come from that woman. Jesus, however, enters the Samaritan town and eats with them, transcending stereotypical limitations. The fact that Jesus stayed with the Samaritans for two days (4:40) is even more significant, since it signifies mutual social recognition and friendship. Malina points out that in a case where hospitality was offered, social definitions changed.³⁵ Especially when the person left, he could leave as friend or as enemy.³⁶ In the case of Jesus, he left as more than a friend: as Savior of the world. The Samaritans were no longer people with whom contact should be avoided; they were now part of the social in-group of Jesus.

The reference to the Samaritans in 8:48 also requires attention. In the heat of the challenge/riposte conflict, Jesus' Jewish opponents remark: "Are we not right in saying that you are a *Samaritan* and have a demon?" The use of the word "Samaritan" seems to imply a negative stereotype. Interestingly enough, according to Schnackenburg, nowhere in Jewish writings is the word "Samaritan" used as a slogan based on stereotyping,³⁷ and the same may be said of the rest of the New Testament.³⁸

Nonetheless, the Johannine context poses the primary source for understanding this reference.³⁹ Borchert argues that, within the direct context, Samaritan should be linked to demon possession,⁴⁰ given that Samaritans are

32 Keener, *Gospel*, 598; cf. also Neyrey, *Gospel*, 94.

33 As menstruants—see *Niddah* 4.1; Barrett, *Gospel*, 350.

34 This evidence comes from 65/66 CE, which means it is too late for Jesus to be aware of, but Brown, *Gospel*, 170, mentions that it is possible that the "regulation was simply canonizing an earlier attitude towards the Samaritan woman."

35 Bruce J. Malina, "The Received View and What It Cannot Do: III John and Hospitality," *Semeia* 36 (1986), 182–86.

36 Malina, "Received View," 185, underlines that hospitality can "be viewed as a reciprocal relationship between communities."

37 Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, Vol. 2 (London: Burns & Oats, 1980), 218.

38 George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, revised edition (Dallas: Word, 2002), 138.

39 Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, Vol. 2, 218.

40 "A frantic enthusiast that was not master of his own thoughts," B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1908), ad loc. cf. 7:20; 8:52; 10:20.

sometimes stereotyped as demonic and cultic magicians.⁴¹ Linking Samaritan prophets like Dositheus and Simon Magnus, who claimed divine dignity and power,⁴² these references to “Samaritan” and “demon possessed” in John 8 may imply such equivalents.⁴³ As a charge against Jesus, however, where neither magic nor exorcism is a theme in John 8, the reference seems simply pejorative and stereotypical.

The idea of magic is also mentioned by Beasley-Murray,⁴⁴ but he combines it with the idea that Samaritans were stereotyped as heretics since they worship on Gerizim, rejecting Jerusalem (4:20–22). Because Samaritans were regarded by some as heretics, the magician and demoniac labels could easily have been projected further onto Jesus by those who accused him of being a Samaritan (8:48), perhaps also reflecting Judean disdain for Galilean messianic claims (7:40–44). Barrett, however, denies that the word “Samaritan” was a regular term of abuse for heretics and questions whether the Jews ever held that opinion.⁴⁵ Lindars would also concur.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, this reference in John 8 at least indicates that the Jewish leaders did not regard Jesus as one of them, which led to their stereotyping him as a Samaritan.

In sum, the discussion with the Samaritan woman, as well as his acceptance of Samaritan hospitality indicates that Jesus was not bound by such stereotypes. He consistently broke the restrictions inherent to ethnic, gender, religious, and moral stereotypes. As Burridge opines, “it is at Jacob’s well in the Samaritan city of Sychar that Jesus really shows his disdain for the divisions of gender, race, belief and moral reputation as he asks the Samaritan woman a drink.”⁴⁷ He acts unconcerned about his own reputation when he helps underdogs and those stereotyped in negative ways.

41 George L. Borchert, *John 1–11: The New American Commentary*, Online Logos System Works (Broadman Press: Nashville, 1996), 307; cf. also Jürgen Becker, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes: Kapitel 1–10* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus Gerd Mohn, 1979), 308. Cf. Strack Billerbeck reference to R. Acha b. Jaaqob’s words, typifying the Samaritans in this way because they do not respect learned people.

42 Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, Vol. 2, 218; Lindars, *Gospel*, 331.

43 Barrett, *Gospel*, 350.

44 Beasley-Murray, *John*, 138; cf. also Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, Vol. 2, 218, who refers to Str. Bil. 2:524–25.

45 Barrett, *Gospel*, 350. Cf. also Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 268–69.

46 Lindars, *Gospel*, 331–32.

47 Richard A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 336.

Another form of stereotype involves a *political* one, suggested by the story of the βασιλικός (*basilikos*) in 4:46. The intended meaning of βασιλικός is not clear, except that the person is somehow linked to a royal house—perhaps a reference to royal lineage, or in service of royalty, either administratively or militarily. Josephus uses this word to refer the troops of the king (*Bel.* 1, 45) and even to non-Jewish mercenaries (for instance, *Ant.* xv, 289; xvii, 266, 270, 281). A variant reading, βασιλισκός [(D, a, boh (codd))], could be translated as “petty king” or princelet, but this reading may reflect assimilation with the old Latin and Vulgate, *regulus*.⁴⁸

Since the man lives in Capernaum on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee,⁴⁹ not far from Tiberias, the seat of the tetrarch Herod Antipas (reigned from 4 BC to AD 39), it could be assumed that he was in service of Herod Antipas. Although only a tetrarch, Antipas was also known as “king.”⁵⁰ Some thus infer that the βασιλικός was a military officer, based on parallel passages in Matt 8:5 and Luke 7:1–10, where a centurion approaches Jesus. In this case, the man would most probably have been a non-Jew.⁵¹ This is of course possible, but Brown⁵² points out that because Capernaum was a border town with many administrative responsibilities, the administrative official could have been Jewish. To identify him with Chuzas (Luke 8:3) or with Manaen (Acts 13:1), however, is pure speculation. In focus here is his royal connection, placing him among the rich (he has a house and servants) and privileged, who controlled much of the land.⁵³ Keener calls him a Galilean aristocrat, inferring that the majority of Galileans would not have felt comfortable associating with such a person (*Vita* 98–99).⁵⁴ After all, Herod Antipas would not have been regarded as the most sensitive man around (*Vita* 65 and *Ant.* 18.136), nor would his hirelings.

It should be noted that this man, whoever he was, is fully accepted by Jesus, including matters of family life (4:53). Although it is by no means certain that he is Roman, the message of acceptance and the offer of eternal life to Greeks,

48 Barrett, *Gospel*, 247.

49 John 2:1; 6:12, 24, 59.

50 For instance, Mark 6:14, 22; Matt 14:9; Gospel of Peter 1:2.

51 Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, Vol. 1 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 466; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Johannine Monograph Series 1 (1971; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 206; Barrett, *Gospel*, 245; Ben Witherington, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 128; Köstenberger, *John*, 169.

52 Brown, *Gospel*, 190.

53 Richard A. Horsley, *Sociology and the Jesus Movement* (London: Continuum, 1994), 214–15.

54 Keener, *Gospel*, 630.

as well as Jews and Samaritans, are striking, irrespective of whether persons are Sanhedrin members, royal officials, or socially questionable Samaritan women.

Within John, the behavior of Jesus displays a spiritual openness that transcends the boundaries of ethnicity, gender, religious affiliations, personal moral records, cultic impurity, and political loyalties. Membership in the family of God is not restricted by restrictive borders stereotypically or realistically drawn around any group or individual.⁵⁵ This is the consistent message of John: namely, that conventional stereotypical classifications of people in the ancient world should no longer play a role when it comes to the radically inclusive offer of salvation through Jesus. According to BurrIDGE, “this gospel offers, then, both an affirmation of the distinctive identity of the Christian community and an active embracing of the world so as to manifest God’s love and life.”⁵⁶

This openness to all is further confirmed in the development of the plot of the narrative, especially in John 3 and 4. Jesus offers eternal life to the Jewish leader, Nicodemus (3:1–17), the Samaritan woman and her people, and the royal official and his household (4:46–54), representing a variety of people from all walks of life. No matter what a people’s identity might be or which stereotypes might be ascribed to them, eternal life is available to all through faith in Jesus.

This has significant ethical implications. If Jews, Samaritans, Greeks (or gentiles), and even Roman officials are welcomed within the family of God, it means for John that they will all be treated as brothers and sisters, and as friends (15:13–15). The power of the divine reality totally supplants criteria based upon stereotypical classifications. Even the Samaritan woman is not to be seen as simply a Samaritan, a woman, a worshipper on Gerizim, or a woman with many husbands; she has now received eternal life within the family of God. The dominant social sphere is now the family of God with its ethical criteria. As Alan Culpepper has pointed out, John’s familial ethos now becomes the dominant reality, determining existence, redefining social relations and status, reframed within the Johannine ethical expectations of love and friendship. Attitudes of openness, unity, and acceptance dominate this transformed ethical landscape, and qualitative distinctions between individuals or groups, on whatever grounds, now have no place.

55 This ethical position is not unique to John, but it echoes the remarks in Gal 3:28 and Col 3:11.

56 BurrIDGE, *Jesus*, 343. Cf. also David Rensberger, *Overcoming the World: Politics and Community in the Gospel of John* (London: SPCK, 1989), 308–09.

2 In-Groups and Out-Groups in John

Closely related to stereotyping is the differentiation between different in-groups and out-groups in John. The distinction between in-groups and out-groups is based on social, religious, and sometimes geographical analyses of reality. Thus, particular social groups in a region or within society may be challenged regarding aspects of power, culture, economy, tradition, or religion. Especially in group-orientated societies, determining in-groups and out-groups functioned also in determining one's self-identity.

Boundaries between groups were sometimes flexible, depending on the contexts; within a small town, everyone within that town could be regarded as in-group, while all members of neighboring towns would be seen as out-groups. On a broader level, between Galilee and Judea, everyone in Galilee (from their perspective) would have been regarded as the in-group versus those in Judea as the out-group—and vice versa. Then again, solidarity with local or regional out-groups could be forged when a larger, common foe was in view. In John 11:45–53, the Johannine group with their Judean opponents are presented as one in-group over and against the Romans who might come and destroy them, because they are seen as part of one group, while in other contexts the Johannine group regards the Jewish opponents as out-group, which in part views Jesus and his Galilean band as the out-group. Nonetheless, attention is merited regarding two groups that play somewhat textured roles in the narrative, namely, the Greeks and the Romans.

2.1 *The Greeks* (Ἕλλην)

Reference is made to the Greeks (Ἕλλην) in 7:35 and 12:20, but in neither context does Jesus directly deal with them. In 7:35 the Jews speculate whether Jesus is going to the diaspora among the Greeks to teach them. The second context, in 12:20–26, is set in Jerusalem, just following the entry of Jesus on the colt. The Pharisees fear that “the whole world has gone after him” (12:19), thus preparing the scene for certain Greeks who ask Philip to see Jesus (12:20). After Jesus engages the Greeks, he announces the hour of his glorification (v.22), which implies a cross-cultural embrace as a goal of his mission. Conversely, the reference to the diaspora of the Greeks in John 7:35 seems to reflect the Jerusalemites' miscomprehension of Jesus' words, but the particular reference of the phrase is unclear. The issue is whether the people referred to are *Greek speaking Jews* who live in the diaspora, or whether they are *Greeks* that live in the regions of the diaspora, i.e. outside of Jerusalem.

This syntactical function of the genitive τῶν Ἑλλήνων in the phrase μὴ εἰς τὴν διασποράν τῶν Ἑλλήνων indicates a particular relation between the diaspora and the Greeks.

- The genitive may be understood as *among* the Greeks, which would make it a genitive “of direction,” or “of region.”⁵⁷ This implies that Jesus is going to the diaspora regions where the Greeks live, i.e. away from typical Jewish areas. It reveals nothing about the nationality or language, since it refers to a place and not to people as such.

According to Brown,⁵⁸ understanding it this way would imply that Jesus will leave Israel and become one of the diaspora Jews, where he will then teach the Greek-speaking people (whether they are ethnically Greeks, Romans, or Jews) in these areas. This possibility leads Brown and others to see the reference of the phrase to everyone living outside of Judea or Galilee who are influenced and united by Greek/Hellenistic culture.⁵⁹

- Another possibility is to understand the genitive as *of* the Greeks, implying the diaspora of Greek speakers, which probably refers to Jews if one takes the contextual use of the term diaspora seriously.⁶⁰ Robinson holds this opinion,⁶¹ but it is rejected by Brown,⁶² since it seems implausible to him that Jesus would have been received in a different way by the diaspora Jews, i.e. becoming part of his sheepfold (10:1–16), than the Jews in Jerusalem itself.

Obviously, it is also possible that the genitive refers to Greeks, and not necessarily to the diaspora Jews. Keener, for instance, argues that, in other New Testament authors like Luke and Paul, the term Ἑλλήν is consistently used to refer to Greeks and not to Jews. This is also mostly the case in the

57 Brown, *Gospel*, 314; so also Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, Vol. 2, 150. Keener, *Gospel*, 721, also mentions this possibility.

58 So also, for instance, Becker, *Evangelium*, 270; Ernst Haenchen, *Johannesevangelium: Ein Kommentar* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1980), 357.

59 Brown, *Gospel*, 314; Robert Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1986), 127; Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, Vol. 2, 218. 150. Jesus' remark in 10:16 might also be of significance here: “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” The idea of going to another area is mentioned, but there is no explicit reference to Greeks or any other people, leaving the context open as far as reference to people is concerned. The implied reference is evidently to people outside “the circle of this fold” (i.e. Jewish people). This means that Jesus also has other sheep in the diaspora, which seemingly excludes no one who is willing to believe. Kysar, *John*, 127, even mentions the possibility that this could include the proselites from the Gentiles to Judaism.

60 Keener, *Gospel*, 721.

61 John A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John*, ed. J. F. Coakley (London: SCM, 1985), 60, 90. On the basis of a similar expression in a letter of Rabbi Gamaliel I, de Boor, *Evangelium*, 243, reckons that the reference should be to diaspora Jews. He does, however, also consider the possibility that the reference could be to the Greeks.

62 Brown, *Gospel*, 314.

LXX.⁶³ In his choice for the reference to Greeks and not Greek-speaking Jews, Schnackenburg⁶⁴ also notes that explicit mention of the Greeks in the second part of the phrase (καὶ διδάσκειν τοὺς Ἕλληνας) excludes any misunderstanding—the Jews think he is going to teach the Greeks; in other words, he will leave the holy land to teach the Greeks there.

In the second context (12:20) certain Greeks (Ἕλληνές τινες) attending the feast in Jerusalem ask to see Jesus. This is the only place they are present as characters in John's narrative, and two possibilities are favored, namely: Greek proselytes (since they are there for the Jewish feast) or Greek-speaking Jews from the diaspora. Brown⁶⁵ and Schnackenburg⁶⁶ identify these Greeks with proselytes⁶⁷ (referring to Acts 17:4) and see their presence as climatic within the narrative. The non-Jewish world is now approaching Jesus. Based on the fact that the word Ἕλλην is "most often used of non-Jewish persons of the Hellenistic world," Kysar⁶⁸ concludes that the reference of the word here is "doubtless Gentiles." He goes on to argue that the reference here should be seen as symbolic, emphasizing the movement of Gentiles to Jesus and the Johannine group as the result of missionary efforts.

Haenchen,⁶⁹ on the other hand, regards these "Greeks" as Jews and not proselytes from the diaspora, but adds that within the Gospel they should be seen as the representatives of the Greek world as a whole, including all Gentiles. He therefore sees this as a clear indication of the Johannine mission. Keener⁷⁰ also mentions this as a possibility. Not only Greek proselytes, but also diaspora Greek-speaking Jews came to Jesus, according to him.

The narrative does not describe the physical meeting between Jesus and these Greeks but continues in a significant manner. Jesus points out that his hour has come, and that he will die like a grain of wheat (12:24–26). He describes his death as the overpowering of the Satan and then remarks (12:32): "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw *all* (*people*) to myself (πάντας ἐλκύσω πρὸς ἐμαυτόν)." Everybody approaching him, including the

63 Keener, *Gospel*, 721.

64 Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, Vol. 2, 150.

65 Brown, *Gospel*, 314, 466, 469.

66 Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, Vol. 2, 381.

67 Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, Vol. 2, 381, excludes the possibility that the reference is to Greek-speaking Jews. These are "full or semi-proselytes," a "class known as God-fearers." L. Schenke, *Johannes Kommentar* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1998), 164, identifies the Greeks as "gottesfürchtige Heiden."

68 Kysar, *John*, 193.

69 Haenchen, *Johannesevangelium*, 445.

70 Keener, *Gospel*, 871–72.

Greeks, whoever this might refer to, will partake in the benefits (fruit—12:24) of his death. There might also be some significance in the Greeks coming (προσῆλθον—12:20) and Jesus' emphasizing following him (ἐμοὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω—12:26) and being where he is (ὅπου εἰμι ἐγὼ ἐκεῖ καὶ ὁ διάκονος ὁ ἐμὸς ἔσται—12:26). Through his paradoxical exaltation on the cross, they will indeed be drawn to him.

The common thread in these references to the "Ἕλληνας, as out-group, is the openness of the Johannine group, disregarding divisions or stereotypes that might otherwise divide ethnic or religious groups. The above discussion illustrates the symbolic inclusiveness of the word "Ἕλληνας, referring to gentiles, proselytes, and possibly even Greek-speaking Jews. Ethically, this implies that behavior is not determined by social restrictions, but only by the attitude of openness that welcomes people to become part of the family of God. There is no evidence in the Gospel that this openness should change, even in the context of rejection of Jesus. The possibility that should be kept alive is that such people are still welcome if they are willing to accept Jesus.

2.2 *The Romans*

"The Greco-Roman setting of the Gospel of John ... is self-evident and obvious," although it is not the only setting to consider.⁷¹ It comes as no surprise that the Gospel is read by some as directly opposing the rule of the Roman Empire.⁷² Cassidy argues that terms like "Savior of the world," "Lord," or "Lord and God" echo terms used for the Roman emperors.⁷³ This creates the impression of a text written in opposition to the Roman rule.⁷⁴ It goes against claims of the Empire, replacing them with claims about Jesus. Cassidy would then argue that John was written to strengthen Johannine believers in the face of Roman persecution.⁷⁵ Thatcher⁷⁶ also argues that John's Christology is his response

71 Peder Borgen, "The Gospel of John and Hellenism: Some Observations," in *Exploring the Gospel of John*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 98. See also Tom Thatcher, *Greater than Caesar: Christology and Empire in the Fourth Gospel* (Fortress: Minneapolis, 2009); Warren Carter, *John and Empire: Initial Explorations* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008).

72 Carter, *John*.

73 Richard J. Cassidy, *John's Gospel in New Perspective: Christology and the Realities of Roman Power*, The Johannine Monograph Series 3 (1992; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015).

74 This is the essence of Carter's argument, *John*.

75 See also Carter, *John*; Esther Kobel, *Dining with John: Communal Meals and Identity Formation in the Fourth Gospel and its Historical and Cultural Context*, Biblical Interpretation Series 109 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 289.

76 Thatcher, *Greater than Caesar*, 5, 39, 88, 125.

to the Roman rule, which is carried out as “countermemory” in order to profane the Roman (and Jewish⁷⁷) traditions.⁷⁸ The message, then, is that Christ is greater and more powerful than even the Roman Empire.⁷⁹ Rensberger⁸⁰ and others, on the other hand, are more skeptical about the possibility of interpreting the conflict between Jesus and Pilate as essentially a conflict between Christianity and the state.⁸¹ Although Carter may go too far in arguing that the aim of the John is to oppose Roman rule directly, a tension may be observed between Jesus and the Romans: a tension in which Jesus consistently has the upper hand. The Romans are positioned in opposition to Jesus, thus forming an out-group.

In John 11:48 the first reference is made to the Romans in their capacity as *military and political power*—this might even be seen as stereotypical. The chief priests and the Pharisees remark: “If we let him (Jesus) go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.” This stereotype seems to underlie the development of the plot. The Jews acknowledge the political and military position of the Romans in Jerusalem by confessing that they only have one king: Caesar.⁸² In 18:3 the Romans are again politically active as a military power with a cohort of soldiers (σπεῖρα⁸³) accompanying the Jewish temple police and their officer

77 Thatcher, *Greater than Caesar*, 53, argues that the Jews are pictured as being devoted to the Roman Empire since they even claim that their king is Caesar.

78 Against Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), Thatcher, *Greater than Caesar*, 15, argues that the imperial authority of Rome extends beyond a single feature: it is a three-headed dog, including the cross, Pilate, and the Jewish authorities. Thatcher’s book also starts with considering Judas as a representative of the Roman rule, arguing that Jesus’ mastership over Judas implies his mastership over the Roman Empire. He develops this idea on different levels and regards the statement in 12:31, that the ruler of this world will be cast out, as a political statement that would normally have referred to Caesar (Thatcher, *Greater than Caesar*, 115–17). Carter, *John*, 299, notes that “Pilate’s role as governor is to protect and advance Rome’s political and economic interests in alliance with the local elite.”

79 Thatcher, *Greater than Caesar*, 135.

80 Rensberger, *Overcoming*, 87–106.

81 See the debate between Harold W. Attridge, Warren C. Carter, and Jan G. van der Watt, “Are John’s Ethics Apolitical?” *NTS* 62 (2016): 484–97. See also Paul N. Anderson, “Foreword,” Cassidy, *John’s Gospel in New Perspective* (2015), xi–xxiii.

82 John 19:15; see Thatcher, *Greater than Caesar*, 53; Sjöf van Tilborg, *Reading John in Ephesus*, NovTSup 83 (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 84–86.

83 Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, R. Wilbur Gingrich [BDAG], *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 936, describes the use of this word in the following

(Ἡ οὖν σπεῖρα καὶ ὁ χιλιάρχος) in their arresting Jesus (18:12).⁸⁴ A power clash is revealed, however, when the cohort and temple police fall to the ground in front of Jesus (18:6), and when Jesus reminds Pilate that real power is given by God alone (18:37). In the passion narrative, Jesus remains in powerful control within such a context of Roman and even Jewish political power (18:36).

The major reference to Roman involvement is of course Jesus' interaction with Pilate, who represents Roman rule and is from the ideological perspective of the narrative a member of the out-group. In the characterization of Pilate as a representative of the Roman Empire as the out-group, which is confronted by the power of the king of truth, whose kingdom is not of this world, the ethos of the in-group here dominates the narrative's thrust. While the storyline in John 18–19 unfolds within several dramatic episodes, the featuring of Pilate in each scenario requires primary attention.

OUTSIDE

1) 18:29–32: **Jews** bring Jesus to **Pilate**.

Pilate asks what the charge is and the Jews reply He is a criminal. Pilate tells them to judge Jesus according to their law, but they answer that it is not permitted.

Pilate: * Asks a question.

* Recommends a solution
(referring the case *back to the Jews*).

INSIDE

2) 18:33–38a: **Pilate** and **Jesus**. Pilate asks Jesus if he is the king of the Jews. Jesus asks whether that is Pilate's opinion; Pilate responds that he is not a Jew, but that the Jews delivered Jesus. He asks Jesus if he is a king, to which Jesus replies, "I am," and then explains that his kingdom is not of this world. Pilate asks him again if he is a king, to which Jesus replies that he came as a witness to the truth, and that those who know truth will listen to him. Pilate asks what truth is.

Pilate: * Asks several questions.

* Pilate concentrates on the
kingship of Jesus.

way: "In our lit. prob. always *cohort*, the tenth part of a legion (the *στ.* thus normally had 600 men, but the number varied.)"

84 Kevin Quast, *Reading the Gospel of John: An Introduction* (New York: Paulist, 1991), 120.

OUTSIDE

3) 18:38b–40 **Pilate** tells the **Jews** that he finds no case against Jesus. He asks if the Jews want him to release Jesus according to the custom. The Jews say no, but they prefer Barabbas—the bandit.

Pilate: * Finds no case against Jesus.

* Wants to *release* Jesus.

INSIDE

19:1–3 **Soldiers** scourge **Jesus** and call him **King** of the Jews.

OUTSIDE

19:4–8 **Pilate** tells the **Jews** that he finds no fault in Jesus. Jesus is brought out and Pilate says: “Here is the man!” Jews shout that Jesus should be crucified. Pilate confirms that he finds no case against Jesus; they should take him. The Jews claim that Jesus should die according to their law, since he called himself Son of God. Pilate becomes afraid.

Pilate: * He finds no fault and has no case against Jesus (2x).

* Pilate wants to *hand Jesus back* to the Jews.

INSIDE

19:9–11 **Pilate** asks **Jesus** where he is from; Jesus does not answer. Pilate reminds Jesus that he has the power to crucify Jesus or to set him free; Jesus answers that he has no power unless it had been given from above.

Pilate: * Ask a question.

* Refers to his power over life and death.

OUTSIDE

19:12–16 **Pilate** tries to release Jesus, but the **Jews** claim that if he releases him, he would not be a friend of Caesar, since anyone who claims to be king is against Caesar. Pilate then presents Jesus as their king. The Jews shouted that Jesus should be crucified, after which Pilate asks whether he should crucify *their* king. The Jews reply: “We have no king but Caesar!” Pilate then hands Jesus over to be crucified.

Pilate: * Asks a question.

* Wants to *release* Jesus.

* Pronounces Jesus **king** (2x).

(cont.)

19:21–22 Pilate writes: “Jesus of Nazareth: Pilate: * Jesus is “**King** of the Jews.” King of the Jews.” The Jews asked him to write “He said he was king of the Jews,” but Pilate reaffirms what was written.

From this diagram a distinct picture of Pilate emerges.

- a) He consistently *asks questions*, as is expected of him in his official capacity in order to gather information. His judgment should thus be seen as based on “facts,” which distinguishes him from the way the Jewish leaders “judge” (7:50–51).
- b) His interest focuses strongly on the kingship of Jesus, which is obviously a political issue. In three of these scenes, he deals with Jesus’ kingship, and in the last two he confirms *Jesus as king*. This is his verdict as royal judge on the issue of Jesus’ kingship.
- c) In two of the scenes he declares that there is *no case against Jesus*, and in three scenes he refers the case back to the Jews. In each case, they argue against him, “forcing” Pilate to go through with the judgment. Pilate not only claims that Jesus is a king, but also that there is no case against him. In this sense, Pilate is characterized as being positive towards Jesus. He is looking for ways to set Jesus free.
- d) Only in one scene (19:9–11) does he refer to his own power to release or crucify Jesus, which is then countered by Jesus. Jesus clarifies that all power is given from above. In a sense, this is ironic, since Pilate consistently wants to release Jesus, but the Jewish leaders prevent him. Thus, based on self-interest, Pilate goes against his own judgment and delivers Jesus to be crucified. His standing with Caesar and consequent self-interest⁸⁵ force him to turn against his own better judgment (19:12–16).

A consistent overall picture of Pilate emerges. Although he in the end delivers Jesus to be crucified, he acts in an official way (asking questions and gathering information), finds no case against Jesus, and tries to release him, even proclaiming Jesus as king. Pilate thus affirms, with some ambiguity, the kingship of Jesus according to the Fourth Gospel. Nonetheless, his self-interest under

85 Ulrich Busse, „Metaphorik und Rethorik im Johannesevangelium: Das Bildfeld vom König,” in *Imagery in the Gospel of John*, ed. Jörg Frey, Jan G. Van der Watt, and Ruben Zimmermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 279–317.

pressure of the Judean leaders forces him to hand Jesus over to be crucified. On the official level, he has acted soundly, but his judgment was marred by personal considerations.⁸⁶

The presentation of the Roman soldiers also directs the reader in this direction. The Roman cohort appears on the scene in 18:3, and in 18:12 they arrest and bind Jesus. While presenting the soldiers as performing their official duties, there is no indication in the text that something personal or stereotypical is intended. The second instance where the soldiers play a role is in 19:1–3. It is clearly said that *Pilate* scourged Jesus, most probably not doing it himself, but the text implies that it is done on his orders. The soldiers apparently follow orders and then continue to dress Jesus in a purple robe (kingly color). They satirically call him “the King of the Jews” (19:3), however, in doing so, they also witness to the truth unwittingly. The soldiers then crucify Jesus (19:23), carrying out their official duties. They divide Jesus’ clothes, something soldiers were also allowed to do, and one can also assume that a soldier gave Jesus the wine when he was thirsty (19:30).

The last task the soldiers perform is again of an official nature. They break the legs of the crucified men and pierce the side of Jesus to accelerate and insure the death of the victims. The eyewitness who saw the water and blood from the side of Jesus also witnesses to this truth within the narrative (19:35), which has a positive tone to it. In the end, the picture of the Roman soldiers has more of an official tone, as they were simply performing what was officially required of them. There is no personal aggression or stereotypical opposition toward Jesus, although the mockery and beating of Jesus in 19:1–3 arguably may seem such. Then again, except for the officer in John 4, there is little direct salvific interaction between Roman soldiers and Jesus.

Interestingly, neither is there much focus (unless one interprets the βασιλικός as a Roman, which is not entirely evident) on Jesus offering salvation or social embrace to Romans. Stereotypes heightening being part of the out-group are toned down by the emphasis on the official duties performed by the Roman soldiers overall. Although their portrayal is restricted to their official duties, there is no indication that Pilate or his soldiers are to be stereotypically excluded from the invitation of Jesus—*whoever* believes will have life. Thus, God’s love for the world (3:16) includes Romans as well as other individuals or groups who might have been alienated by the stereotypical operations of first-century Palestinian society and culture.

86 A positive remark is also found in 19:38, where Pilate allowed Joseph to take the body of Jesus. One can say that he is pictured as being positive towards Jesus.

3 Concluding Remarks

The consistent message of John is that the stereotypical classification of people as was current in the ancient world and in the Johannine situation should no longer play any role when it comes to the offer of salvation through Jesus as the Christ. Burridge notes: “this gospel offers, then, both an affirmation of the distinctive identity of the Christian community and an active embracing of the world so as to manifest God’s love and life.”⁸⁷ The implications of ignoring stereotypical classifications are significant. If Samaritans, Greeks (gentiles, whoever they are), Jews, and even officials of the Roman rule are welcome within the family of God, it means for John that they will all be treated as brothers and sisters, or as friends (15:13–15). For instance, the Samaritan woman should not see herself as a Samaritan, a woman, a worshipper on Gerizim, or a woman with many husbands, etc. She is child of God, who has received eternal life as member of the family of God.

The dominant social sphere of anyone who believes in Jesus is now the family of God, which forms the dominant reality that determines all existence. This redefinition of social relations and status is framed within the Johannine ethical expectations of love and friendship. The attitude of openness, unity, and acceptance dominates this ethical approach.

While the radical nature of this message may seem “ordinary” or “nothing new” to present-day Christian readers, this was certainly not the case among first-century audiences. The social identities that guided them to make sense of their cultural surroundings were based on stereotypes: grouping themselves and others into in-groups or out-groups. Without these distinctions, the social fiber of their settings would have disintegrated, and valued identities would have been questioned. When Jesus rose above these stereotypes, a new definition of in-groups and out-groups also resulted. Everyone is invited to become part of the in-group of Jesus, irrespective of how they were stereotypically grouped by society. Unfortunately, persons not willing to accept Jesus remain part of the out-group, but any who warm to the light or abide in the truth are nonetheless welcomed into the divine family (1:9–13). Stereotypes should play no role, but in-groups and out-groups unfortunately still do. This situation forms the motivation of the Johannine mission: the will of God is that everybody should believe in Jesus, resulting in just one group without any out-group, namely, the family of God.

87 Burridge, *Jesus*, 343.

There Are No “Aporias”: Ancient Media Culture and the Problem of the Fourth Gospel’s Composition-History

Tom Thatcher

Among his many substantial contributions to the recent history of Johannine Studies, Alan Culpepper’s *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (1983) stands out at as a watershed moment in the field.¹ Apart from its insightful exegetical observations and reflections on key critical issues, Culpepper’s work signaled—and in many respects launched—a dramatic shift in the way scholars approach the Gospel of John as narrative. *Anatomy* was produced in the wake of two decades of fruitful research built on the premise that the Fourth Gospel as we know it today was the product of a long and complex history of composition and revision in response to the shifting fortunes of the Johannine Community. While Culpepper himself had already made an important contribution to understandings of this community and its history,² *Anatomy* surmounted the obstacles that had stalled this line of inquiry by appealing to a broad range of theoretical models drawn from Narrative Criticism, a move that allowed him to approach the Fourth Gospel holistically as a unified unit of communication.³ Born in a world where the parts of John’s presentation and theology tended to be discussed in isolation from the whole, *Anatomy* led to a significant rediscovery of the Johannine narrative. Twenty-five years after the release of *Anatomy*, the thirty-six international scholars who contributed to *What We Have Heard from the Beginning* (2007) cited Culpepper and his work more often than any other author in the history of the field—besides, of course, the Fourth Evangelist himself.⁴

1 R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1983).

2 See R. Alan Culpepper, *The Johannine School: An Evaluation of the Johannine-School Hypothesis Based on an Investigation of the Nature of Ancient Schools* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975).

3 Culpepper’s work was most explicitly inspired by Seymour Chatman’s *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), but it also drew heavily upon the works of Wayne Booth, Gerard Genette, and Wolfgang Iser.

4 See *What We Have Heard from the Beginning: The Past, Present, and Future of Johannine Studies*, ed. Tom Thatcher (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007). Culpepper’s work is

Viewed within the larger history of research, the genius of Culpepper's approach lay in his ability to develop a deep and coherent interpretive model that sidestepped the problem of the Fourth Gospel's "aporias." Source-critical and "developmental" approaches to the composition-history of the Gospel of John have frequently appealed to the notorious "aporias" in the text—narrative and theological discontinuities in the flow of John's presentation. These conspicuous "breaks" are typically viewed as literary seams, tangible proof that the Gospel has been stitched together from various earlier sources or/and that the present text is the final in a series of revised editions. Culpepper did not so much resolve the problem of John's aporias as simply ignore it; indeed, the theoretical models in which *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* was grounded are now widely caricatured for their almost complete disregard for considerations surrounding the authors and original audiences of texts, in preference for a laser focus on the inner workings of the narratives themselves. For this very reason, even scholars committed to source-critical and development models have been able to benefit from, and appropriate the conclusions of, Culpepper's work. So successful was this aspect of Culpepper's project that terms like "implied audience" and "flat characters"—strange and new in 1983—are now fully integrated into the lexicon of biblical scholarship and are regularly used even in studies built on radically different theoretical platforms.

The present essay will build upon Culpepper's precedent but will go a step further: arguing that the Fourth Gospel's apparent aporias can be ignored not simply because certain interpretive models would tend to minimize their significance, but because *they in fact do not exist*. Like Culpepper, the present essay will support its claim by appealing to interdisciplinary models regarding the nature of narratives, in this case models based on the emerging portrait of first-century media culture and of texts produced within that culture. While media studies cannot prove definitively that the Gospel of John is a unified composition produced by a single author, they do suggest that it would be impossible to identify the Fourth Gospel's sources or earlier editions with sufficient precision to support complex theories about the composition history of the text and the community that produced it.

To support these claims, the current argument will proceed in four steps, reflecting the logic and essential premises of both developmental models and media studies. Part One of this paper will offer a brief overview of the Johannine "aporias" and their significance to recent discussions of the Fourth Gospel's composition-history. Part Two will reframe discussion of the aporias

cited thirty-one times in the volume by a wide range of contributors, often in contexts where *Anatomies* is discussed in detail and with specific reference to the polar shift it initiated.

by highlighting several significant features of the media culture in which the Gospel of John was produced and published. As will be seen, a more nuanced understanding of the interfaces between orality and writing in antiquity raises a number of new questions about the nature of the Fourth Gospel's aporias and the compositional processes that may have produced them. Parts Three and Four will narrow the discussion to engage two specific issues that are foundational to developmental and source-critical models: the nature and origin of the Johannine “aporias”; and, the ways in which Johannine Christians would have used a written Gospel. Part Three will suggest that many of the literary features of the Fourth Gospel that are typically cited as “aporias” are in fact natural byproducts of oral composition. Part Four will argue that the interfaces between memory, orality, and writing in the first-century media world make it difficult to imagine that Johannine Christians would have felt compelled to revise a written Gospel numerous times.

1 The Johannine Aporias

For more than a century now, biblical scholars have shown considerable interest in the Fourth Gospel's “aporias,” the many “conspicuous seams and style differences” that appear to scar the surface of John's narrative.⁵ The Fourth Gospel's aporias fall into two broad categories: narrative discontinuities and theological tensions.

The first category of aporia, *narrative discontinuities*, includes the “roughnesses and tensions—the interruptions and sudden turns, *non sequiturs* and even contradictions, passages with dense or overloaded wording, the doublets—that so patently characterize 4G and ... incongruously dot an otherwise smooth narrative.”⁶ The most obvious instances of this phenomenon appear in passages where elements of John's presentation seem flagrantly self-contradictory. At John 14:31, for example, Jesus interrupts the Farewell Discourse by suddenly saying, “Rise, let us go from here” (ἐγείρεσθε ἄγωμεν ἐντεῦθεν). This statement would appear to be a natural segue to 18:1, which indicates that Jesus and his disciples have left the upper room and are going to Gethsemane. However, 14:31 and 18:1 are obviously separated by three more

5 W. Nicol, *The Sēmeia in the Fourth Gospel: Tradition and Redaction*, NovTSup 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 4.

6 Robert Fortna, *The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor: From Narrative Source to Present Gospel* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1988), 4.

chapters of dialogue, in which Jesus continues to discuss his mission and identity in distinctly Johannine terms.

Other narrative discontinuities relate to difficulties in the sequence of episodes in the Fourth Gospel's presentation. For example, at John 5:1, Jesus travels to Jerusalem for a "feast of the Jews," and while there he heals a lame man at the Bethesda complex and offers an extended discourse on the "witnesses" who testify on his behalf. Following this discourse, however, and with no apparent resolution to the Bethesda conflict, John 6:1 indicates that "after these things, Jesus went over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee" (μετὰ ταῦτα ἀπῆλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς πέραν τῆς θαλάσσης τῆς Γαλιλαίας)—a strange note, in view of the fact that Jesus presumably would need to be on one side of the Sea of Galilee before he could go "over to the other side" (πέραν), whereas the events of chapter 5 (and 7) are clearly set in Jerusalem. Other discontinuities in the narrative include an apparent break between John 20 and 21, where 20:30–31 seems to reflect a first ending echoed by 21:25, and John 1:1–18, where the poetic form of the Prologue is interspersed with highlighting the witness of John the Baptizer, referenced in 1:6–8, 15, and 19–36.

The second major category of Johannine aporias, *theological tensions*, is more nuanced but perhaps ultimately more significant than the narrative discontinuities. Scholars have often pointed out that various passages in the Fourth Gospel appear to promote conflicting theological viewpoints. Thus, for example, John sometimes seems to advocate a "subordinationist" Christology, stressing that Jesus can only do what the Father instructs him to do and portraying Christ as an essentially passive conduit for God's revelation to humanity (see, e.g., John 4:34; 5:19, 30; 6:38; 7:16; 8:28–29; 14:31; 17:4). At the same time, however, the Fourth Gospel promotes what is arguably the highest Christological vision in the New Testament, with the Johannine Jesus claiming on numerous occasions that he enjoys the same rights and privileges as his "Father" in heaven and, indeed, that he and God are essentially "one" (see, e.g., 5:20–23; 8:56–59; 10:30; 14:9–10). Similarly, in some contexts John insists that faith is a divine gift, with belief in Christ portrayed as the result of God's calling or as an ontological attribute of those who are naturally God's children (see, e.g., 6:37, 39, 44, 65; 8:43, 47; 10:25–29). In other instances, however, John stresses that belief comes from reasoned conclusions about Jesus' signs and words and reminds the reader that faith requires courage in the face of persecution, so that choice is paramount (see, e.g., 5:24, 35–38; 6:29, 40; 10:25, 37–38; 12:42–43; 20:30–31). Tensions of this kind may be viewed as "aporias" in the sense that they represent apparent breaks in the Gospel's flow of thought and thus threaten the theological unity of John's presentation.

While many of the Fourth Gospel's aporias are of exegetical, theological, and/or historical interest in their own right, their relevance to the present

discussion emerges from their collective significance to research on the composition-history of the text. In the words of Robert Fortna, whose pioneering work in the 1970s and 1980s shaped much of the subsequent source-critical study of the Fourth Gospel, "the most natural explanation for these phenomena [the aporias] ... is that *the narrative stems from more than one author*: it consists of an older and a younger layer."⁷ More recently, Urban von Wahlde, whose three-volume *Gospel and Letters of John* represents the most systematic expression of the developmental approach to the Fourth Gospel's composition to date, has asserted that the aporias make it "unrealistic to attempt to treat the text of the Gospel as a simple, unified, and coherent composition." Indeed, "the [Fourth] Gospel in its present form is not the work of a single individual but has gone through a series of three editions at the hands of three different individuals."⁸ The Fourth Gospel's aporias, then, do not simply reflect poor writing or confused theological thinking, but rather may be viewed as "seams" in the narrative, visible lines between layers of composition. Over time, the Johannine Christians combined earlier sources and/or revised their written Gospel to address emerging challenges in the ongoing life of their community. With so many hands and voices contributing to this process, one can readily understand why the present text of the Fourth Gospel would evidence narrative discontinuities and theological tensions.

2 Life Outside the Gutenberg Galaxy: "Writing" and "Reading" in Early Christianity

As noted earlier, the present essay will explore the adequacy of source-critical and developmental models, particularly their understanding of the Johannine aporias, by raising two critical questions. First, how are the aporias in the Fourth Gospel best explained? Source and developmental theorists essentially view the aporias as abnormalities—seams and scars that mar an otherwise pristine presentation of Jesus' ministry and message. This conclusion is entirely reasonable when John's story is viewed through the lens of modern narrative aesthetics and theological categories: if the Gospel of John had been written by a group of Christian preachers in the 1990s, one could only conclude that the aporias were products of redaction, ongoing revision, collaborative composition, and, in the end, poor copyediting. But does this model adequately account for the ways that written texts were produced and consumed in the

⁷ Fortna, *Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor*, 5–6; emphasis added.

⁸ Urban Von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 1.12, 1.1.

ancient world? In a first-century context, what compositional processes would most likely produce the Johannine aporias?

Second, and more broadly, do source and developmental theories provide a plausible portrait of the motivations and actions of those individuals who produced the Gospel of John as it exists today? Specifically here, does the evidence suggest that a first-century person such as the Fourth Evangelist would combine various earlier documents into a written Gospel, or that Johannine Christians would feel the need to revise their written Gospel one or several times, thus unwittingly producing the aporia-laden version of the Fourth Gospel that exists today?

Before attempting to answer these questions, it will be helpful to frame them within a broader consideration of the ways that texts were produced and consumed in the first century. In view of space limitations and to focus the discussion, I will proceed here from the familiar to the unfamiliar, noting a number of key points where modern conceptions of the production, publication, and use of written texts would likely differ from ancient conceptions. Two sets of issues that are particularly relevant to the problem of the Fourth Gospel's aporias will be highlighted: (1) differences between modern and ancient conceptions of "authorship," and corresponding understandings of the nature of written texts; and, (2) differences between modern and ancient conceptions of "publication," and corresponding understandings of the ways that texts generate and communicate meaning. As will be seen, first-century conceptions of "authorship" and "publication" differed dramatically from modern conceptions, reflecting fundamental differences in the ways that texts were/are experienced in antiquity and in modern Western media culture.

The Author

On the first point, ancient and modern readers would hold strikingly different conceptions of "authorship," the ways that texts are produced and corresponding assumptions about the contents of written documents. Many of these differences are grounded in the respective ancient and modern experiences of the relationship between author and reader. In modern media culture, the relationship between an author—conceived as a discrete individual, and her readers—also a group of discrete individuals, is characterized primarily by *absence* and, normally, anonymity. The author of a modern book is never physically present to her readership at the moment the text is produced and generally does not know the members of that readership. Similarly, individual readers generally do not know the author personally and are also normally separated from other readers by time and space.

By contrast, in John's media culture—particularly the very immediate media culture of the Johannine circle of churches—the relationship between authors and readers was characterized primarily by *presence*. In antiquity, written documents were produced through oral composition, normally involving dictation to a scribe and often before a live audience, and texts were typically published through oral recitation to groups (cf. the situations envisioned at Rom 16:22; Col 4:16–18; 1 Pet 4:12; and Rev 22:18–19). Even in the case of private correspondence, documents were typically read aloud, not least because even educated individuals often would not enjoy the same level of functional literacy that modern Westerners enjoy as a byproduct of widespread public education, standardized conventions of style and spelling, and the visual consistency of machine-tooled manuscripts. Simply put, in the modern world, "authorship" is viewed as a private and deliberate process, with the moment of production necessarily preceding the moment of reception. In the ancient world, composition and reception were done in real time.

These essential differences between the ancient and modern conceptions of "authorship" carry with them correspondingly different assumptions about the nature of written texts. Because modern authors and readers encounter one another in absent silence, readers do not expect to hear the voice of the audience in a written document; consumers do not participate in the production of texts, and therefore do not contribute to their style, scope, or content. Further, since the unknown author has the liberty of working at her own pace and therefore enjoys numerous opportunities to review and revise a pre-publication version of the manuscript, the modern reader may reasonably assume that any published document is the product of a long, careful, and reasoned process of drafting, editing, and rewriting. Finally, and perhaps most significantly here, because modern documents reflect careful and deliberate composition, readers expect them to be entirely coherent, even at the level of the individual sentence or phrase. Since the author had ample opportunity to consider and select each word, the text should be subject to scrutiny at the micro-level, with any misplaced phrase or failure of continuity representing poor writing or sloppy production work. Overall, in modern media culture, readers sacrifice active participation in the production of texts for a reasonable expectation that every written document is essentially a revised and refined representation of what its author wished to communicate.

Ancient experiences of authorship, however, would produce conceptions of the nature of written texts strikingly different from those outlined above. First, since ancient authors did not compose alone or in silence, and since their works were typically experienced through oral recitation in group settings

(a “group” here being any number of people greater than one), individuals such as the Fourth Evangelist and the Elder of 1–2–3 John did not enjoy the luxury of ignoring or disregarding potential or actual responses from their audiences. Texts composed before live audiences, and/or texts like the Fourth Gospel that were composed for relatively small circles of readers associated with the author’s community, would obviously reflect the social and personal dynamics of the various relationships between the author and the audience and between individual members of the audience. In this respect, ancient texts were community products, emerging from the real or anticipated dialectic between the oral performer and aural recipients.

Second, and following from the first point, ancient readers would not necessarily expect that a written document represented the author’s final, or even best, word on the subject. Correspondingly, ancient authors would not anticipate the levels of micro-analysis to which modern books are typically subjected, and their works would not evidence the patterns of micro-coherence that characterize modern biographies, court depositions, or political press releases. Aside from the simple fact that the available technologies of writing did not lend themselves to multiple rounds of pre-publication revision at the sentence level, the presentation and rhetoric of ancient texts were necessarily oriented toward the total effect of an oral reading on a listening audience; listeners experience texts as forests, not as stands of trees. This is not to say, of course, that ancient documents were not coherent, but rather to note that the coherence of their presentation would lie, to some extent, in extratextual factors—much of what an ancient author or lector said/wrote would have reflected the actual or anticipated responses of particular listening audiences as much as the specific content that the author wished to communicate. Simply put, “copyediting” in the modern sense did not exist in antiquity, and it certainly would not have been practical or necessary in the case of documents produced for occasional recitation in local religious communities.

Publication

A second significant complex of differences between ancient and modern media culture relates to the ways that documents were/are published. As noted above, modern readers generally experience printed texts alone and in silence, isolated from the author and other readers. In John’s context, however, texts were typically “published” through oral reading, or recitation from memory, before a live audience. These differing modes of publication carry with them correspondingly different hermeneutics (what it means to say that a text “means” something) and also impose different limitations on the reader’s ability to manipulate the content of a text. For purposes of the present study, it will

be helpful to explore these differences in terms of two narrower sets of issues: the notion of "context" and the relationship between context and meaning, and the possibility of isolating and/or combining individual units or "passages" of text for sustained analysis.

In modern parlance, the word "context" refers primarily (and often solely) to intratextual relationships—how the various pieces of a document fit together, or how one particular passage or line relates to the larger whole. This assumption is a logical extension of modern modes of publication, which exchange the immediate and interpersonal dimension of oral communication for the permanence of print. Written words are things in space, and as such one can easily envision that their value emerges from, and indeed may be reduced to, their spatial relationships to other objects—i.e., to other written words. Since the printed page bears within itself everything needed to produce a "meaningful" reading, readers require no special knowledge of the circumstances of a text's composition, or even of the author's identity, in order to derive value from its content.

Yet while the above definition of "context" essentially dehumanizes the act of communication, it rewards the reader with unlimited potentials for the manipulation of a document's content—potentials that, returning to the focus of the present volume, Culpepper's *Anatomy* exploited to the full. These potentials are foundational to all academic study of the Bible (and every other written corpus), and particularly to all research on the style and theology of specific biblical books. To illustrate from the case at hand: when the "meaning" of the Gospel of John is reduced to the sum of the meanings of its individual lines, one can readily undertake a deep and detailed study of the nuances of some specific word or phrase that John happens to use in a particular context, even if John himself would not have been able to remember that he said that in quite that particular way. Further, since print empowers readers to view, like God, the entire scope of the Fourth Gospel's narrative from a point outside the temporal boundaries of the text itself, one can readily move back and forth among the various sections of the Gospel, allowing quick and easy comparison of discrete and contiguous units of text that might have been neither discrete nor contiguous in the evangelist's own mind. Having isolated John's words and the stumps of his ideas, one can readily rearrange these into new configurations that reflect topical outlines, theological categories, and research agendas quite different from the outlines and agendas native to the text itself. One can, for example, construct a "Johannine Christology" from a mosaic of fragments that have been lifted from their narrative frame and rearranged to produce an abstracted image of Jesus that never actually emerges from any specific context or statement in the Fourth Gospel itself. Simply put, in modern media culture,

the “meaning” of the Gospel of John lies in the physical book and in the unlimited potential for the manipulation of its atomized contents, in a world where it makes sense to refer to “contents” in the plural when talking about a single act of communication.

In John’s media context, by contrast, prevailing modes of publication would produce different hermeneutical conceptions and different potentials for an audience manipulation of a text’s content. On the former point (hermeneutical conceptions), oral texts, and handwritten manuscripts produced in oral-traditional contexts, are not closed semeiotic systems. Oral words are events in time, transactions among individuals. As such, they derive their meaning not only, and in many instances not primarily, from their relationships to other words, but rather from the total human context in which they are exchanged, including the mnemonic context of the group and individuals within it. To the extent that this is the case, the “meaning” of an orally published text cannot be reduced to the sum of the values of the words in the document, simply because the words in the document bear the referential residue of the specific human situation in which the text was transcribed.

On the latter point above, and perhaps more significantly here, ancient modes of publication would essentially reverse the limitations upon the reader noted earlier. Modern readers are temporally and spatially distant from the author and therefore have no control over the content of a book, but they absorb this loss to gain unlimited power to manipulate the physical text. Ancient audiences, by contrast, were often temporally and spatially present at the moment of publication (and sometimes also of composition), and therefore could significantly impact the shape of a text’s presentation in any given instance. But this privilege was purchased at the price of severely limiting any subsequent manipulation of the document’s content. Even the most literate Johannine Christians would find it difficult to quickly locate and compare individual passages and words in the Fourth Gospel with a view to constructing “a Christology” or “an eschatology” from that document, and even if they were inclined to do so, their conclusions would be developed and articulated not in private academic reflection but rather in dialogue with other individuals within their religious community.

3 **Aporias and/as Oral-Memorial Composition**

With the above considerations in view, one may return to the specific problem of the Fourth Gospel’s aporias and their implications. The first question to be addressed here concerns the origin of those textual phenomena briefly

outlined earlier that have been identified as "breaks" in John's presentation. What compositional processes most likely produced the various discontinuities that may be observed in the current text of the Fourth Gospel?

Despite their individual nuances, all source and developmental theories answer the above question in essentially similar ways. Specifically, these models clearly envision the Fourth Evangelist, and each person who worked on the written gospel material before or after him, as an "author" or "editor" in the modern sense of the word: an individual who produced a fixed text that reflects her/his own genius, interests, theology, and literary style—distinct from the interests, geniuses, theologies, and literary styles of other prior and subsequent authors. The very notion of literary "sources" and "editions" reflects the logic of modern models of authorship and publication—it would be meaningless to speak of an "edition" when comparing two oral recitations of the foot-washing story (John 13:1–17) on different occasions before a group gathered for a sacred meal in the triclinium of a house in Pergamum. In similar fashion, the logic of print makes it possible to view certain features of the Fourth Gospel as "aporias," the types of discontinuities that would naturally characterize a document produced by three or four successive hands working alone and in silence.

Research into the media culture of early Christianity, however, has significantly challenged the adequacy of the "authorship" model for understanding the composition and reception of the NT documents. As noted above, and as is now common knowledge in the field of biblical studies, the books of the NT likely were produced through oral composition and certainly for aural consumption. Proceeding from this premise, one can readily see that many of the narrative perplexities in the Fourth Gospel are natural features of oral speech. Specifically here, all of the narrative discontinuities identified as "aporias" earlier in this essay—apparent contradictions, sequence problems, digressions and resumptions—are the natural and predictable residue of orality, not literary abnormalities that require special explanation.

To return to the first example noted earlier: when John 14:31 is located in a context of live composition/recitation, one can readily see that Jesus' command to depart is not a "disruption" in the flow of the Farewell Discourse, but rather a performance cue or stage direction that helps the audience visualize the backdrop of the scene. The words "Rise, let us go from here" invite the listener to imagine that Jesus and the disciples are leaving the upper room and moving along the road to the garden, with Christ continuing his comments as they walk. Similar instances—stage cues of this kind—that clearly do not create aporias may be observed elsewhere in John's presentation. For example, commentators have long been perplexed by the occurrence of the word οὕτως at John 4:6: ὁ οὖν Ἰησοῦς κεκοτπιακῶς ἐκ τῆς ὁδοιπορίας ἐκαθέζετο οὕτως ἐπὶ τῇ

πηγῇ (“Then Jesus, being tired from the journey, sat down *thus/like this* by the [Jacob’s] well”), where he will meet the Samaritan woman. While it is indeed difficult to imagine why an author would state that Jesus “sat down *this way*,” the term is entirely comprehensible when viewed as a stage direction for oral recitation: “Jesus sat down *like this* next to the well,” indicating that the performer/reader should sit down and remain seated while narrating the scene that follows. Similarly, in an oral performance context, the phrase ἐγείρεσθε ἄγωμεν ἐντεῦθεν (“Rise, let us go from here”) at John 14:31 would naturally function as a performance cue, leading the listening audience’s visual imagination from the upper room to the road to the garden, with Jesus’ final prayer (John 17) ending as the party arrives at Gethsemane (18:1).

To return to a second significant example mentioned earlier: most modern readers would readily affirm that the events of John 4–7 appear to be out of sequence—Galilee, Jerusalem, Galilee, Jerusalem; perhaps resulting from the addition of John 6 to an earlier narrative. This discontinuity will be apparent to anyone who reads the Gospel of John after reviewing a topographical map of Palestine or a Google Earth satellite image—to such a reader, it seems problematic that Jesus is in Jerusalem in one scene, goes “across the Sea of Galilee” in the next, and then appears back in Jerusalem in the next to discuss something he did there previously. Yet this observation raises the question of whether the Fourth Gospel’s sequence would be judged problematic by an ancient person, who (a) had never seen a map of Palestine; and, (b) had likely never seen a “map” of anything, and certainly nothing possessing the sense of scale and realism that characterizes modern maps; but, (c) was familiar with memory theater techniques of rhetorical composition, in which place names like “Bethesda” and “across the Sea of Galilee” were used to memorize the outline of a public speech, or were mentioned to establish a symbolic setting for a particular episode rather than to fix its geographical location. Put another way, the question here is not whether the events of John 4–7 appear to be out of sequence to modern readers, but whether John’s use of place names would have communicated a particular atmosphere or value to ancient audiences, whether or not these audiences had any real sense of the spatial relationships between Samaria, Judea, and Galilee. The narrator’s interest might well have been the dramatic advance of the story rather than the spatial-temporal progression of an itinerary.

Of course, proposals such as the above are not particularly new—certainly, I am not the first to argue that the monologue in John 15–17 was delivered while Jesus and the disciples were walking on the road.⁹ Source and developmental

9 See, e.g., B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (1881; rpt. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950), 211; D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and the Final Prayer of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 86; Andreas Köstenberger, *John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 445–46.

theorists have generally rejected such readings on the grounds that they do not account for the complexity of the textual data. But the issue here is not whether any particular explanation of the Fourth Gospel's aporias is simple or complex, but rather whether any specific explanation paints a credible picture of how people in the first century might have produced and published stories about Jesus. The approach outlined here is consistent with the emerging consensus on the dynamics of first-century media culture. Whether or how source and developmental theories are also consistent with those dynamics is yet to be determined.

4 Multiple Editions vs. Multiple Originals

The second question to be addressed here touches on an essential premise of source and developmental theories of the Fourth Gospel's composition. Does it seem likely that the Johannine Christians would have produced multiple revisions of a written Gospel? And if so, or if not, why would they have done, or not done, this? While space does not permit an adequate answer, a more careful consideration of the dynamics of ancient media culture reframes these questions in ways that might helpfully inform future discussions.

Despite their individual nuances, all source and developmental theories answer the above two questions in essentially the same way. On the first point—would the Johannine Christians have produced multiple editions of their Gospel?—the Fourth Gospel's aporias clearly indicate that the present text is the last in a series of revisions; *ipso facto*, the Johannine Christians must have produced multiple editions of their Gospel, perhaps using earlier written sources along the way. On the second point, the question of motivation, source and developmental theorists have tended to assume a direct correlation between the respective compositional layers of the Fourth Gospel and significant events in the history of the Johannine Community. Over time, the Johannine Christians faced new situations and new challenges, and of course their beliefs evolved in response to these experiences. The various revisions of the Fourth Gospel represent attempts to adjust and expand the Gospel's presentation in light of these new beliefs and circumstances, allowing Jesus' message and example to speak directly to the needs of a struggling church.

While these answers are entirely reasonable, they are grounded in an untested assumption about the relationship between community experiences, ideological evolutions, and media preferences. Developmental models, and the corresponding histories of the Johannine Community that are based on these models, simply assume that ancient Christians would respond to crises by revising their foundational documents—they would write new Gospels

every time things happened that changed their views. It goes without saying that religious beliefs emerge and evolve in dialogue with developments in the larger world; at the same time, the reasons why people develop particular beliefs are not the same as the reasons why people express those beliefs through any given media outlet. Specifically here, while the crisis theory can reasonably explain the developmental history of the theology of the Johannine School and the corresponding evolution of the Johannine Jesus tradition, one cannot simply assume that the fact that Christians went through new experiences and developed new beliefs about Jesus would be in itself a sufficient motivation to rewrite a Gospel two or three or five times. These motivations would need to be explained on other grounds, grounds that would adequately account for the ways that people in John's media culture produced and used written texts.

Any attempt to determine whether or why ancient Christians would revise a written Gospel, or even how they might have used a written Gospel in their community life, must account for what Werner Kelber has called the "equi-primorality" of oral performances of traditional material.¹⁰ As noted earlier, words on paper are things in space that persist over time, enduring objects produced at specific moments in the past. This fact—that Text B was written after Text A and before Text C—makes diachronic analysis possible. In cases where several documents address the same or similar content, and where it can be inferred that the later authors were aware of the work of their predecessors, one may reasonably refer to the earliest document in the series as the "original," with later documents representing "copies of" or "variations from/on" the content and presentation of this original. Oral words, however, are events in time, and as such do not persist beyond the moment of their utterance, a fact that significantly problematizes any attempt at a close diachronic analysis. If one were to compare seven published versions of the story of Cinderella written by six different authors, one could reasonably speak of certain features of the later releases as "variations" on the earlier, "original" account. If, however, a woman tells the story of Cinderella to her grandchildren on seven different occasions, it would be unhelpful to understand her later renderings as "variations" on an "original": each telling reflects the dynamics of its own performance moment

10 See here especially Werner Kelber, "Jesus and Tradition: Words in Time, Words in Space," in *Orality and Textuality in Early Christian Literature*, ed. Joanna Dewey (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), 139–67; "The Case of the Gospels: Memory's Desire and the Limits of Historical Criticism," *Oral Tradition* 17 (2002): 55–86; "The Works of Memory: Christian Origins and Mnemohistory—A Response," in *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*, ed. Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher; Semeia Studies (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 221–48.

and represents what grandmother wished to say on that particular occasion—specifically, each represents what grandmother actually said on each occasion, with the question remaining of whether she actually “wished” to say it quite like that or was even thinking about what she was saying. Similarly, in John’s media culture, “each rendition [of an oral saying/story] was an original version, and in fact *the original version*.”¹¹

To illustrate: if a Johannine Christian told the story of the Bethesda healing (John 5:1–9) fifteen different times, that individual would not view any one of those performances as “the original” and the others as “copies” or “variations.” This person would view all of her oral performances as “originals,” and would likely view all of them as essentially identical, even though a comparison of the transcripts of those different performances would likely reveal striking differences. Further, the evidence does not suggest that this storyteller would perceive a dramatic change in the situation if someone were to record any one of her performances in writing. If the Fourth Evangelist had told the Bethesda story thirteen times before it was committed to writing, then proceeded to tell the story again on eighteen subsequent occasions—and he may have told it many more times than that—this individual would not view the written fourteenth version as “the original” and his subsequent performances as “variations” on that original, just as modern musicians do not view their live performances as “variations” on an earlier recording of the same song. The evangelist’s thirty-two renderings are, rather, “equiprimordial,” each equally primitive and each reflecting the circumstances of the setting in which it was communicated. For John, every individual account of the story is an original, and all are also “the same.”

Returning to the issue at hand, the logic of “multiple originals” problematizes the crisis theory—the notion that members of the Johannine School would feel compelled to revise their written Gospel in light of new beliefs and experiences—at two key points. First, in a media culture where written documents are not necessarily viewed as the author’s best or final word on a subject, where documents are produced and published through oral recitation, and finally, where the expense and difficulty of manufacturing documents is high and the general literacy rate is low, there would be no particular reason to produce a new edition of a written Gospel if one wished to revise its content. Oral performers could easily elaborate upon the traditional material included in the extant text in new and creative ways during live performances, ways that would effectively address new concerns without incurring the expense of a

11 Kelber, “Jesus and Tradition,” 151; emphasis original.

new publication—exactly the way that modern preachers use the highly-fixed print text of the Fourth Gospel today.

Second, it seems unlikely that members of the Johannine School would detect a significant difference between their own evolved viewpoints and the theological viewpoint expressed in the text of their written Gospel. Put another way, source and developmental theorists generally attribute a level of historical consciousness—a sense that the past was distinct from the present in significant ways—to the ancient Johannine Christians that cannot be documented elsewhere in primitive Christianity. Even those individuals who were sufficiently literate to know the actual contents of the written Gospel would likely view their own outlooks to be continuous, and in fact synonymous, with the text's theological outlook, and would view both the written text and their own oral performances as expressions of what their faith community had always believed. This being the case, it is difficult to explain why a Johannine Christian would feel the need to revise a written Gospel in response to new theological developments. If the written text says what I myself am saying right now, and if both are simply expressing what we all have known “from the beginning” (1 John 2:7, 24; 3:11), why bother to produce a new edition?

In conclusion, while the approach adopted in this essay cannot definitively prove or disprove any particular model for understanding the Fourth Gospel's composition-history, it would significantly reframe a number of the foundational questions that have driven recent discussions of the authorship of the Gospel of John. First and primarily, the relevance of the term “*aporia*” should be revisited, inasmuch as many of the textual features of the Fourth Gospel that have fallen under this heading are readily explicable as natural byproducts of oral composition and publication. Second, any attempt to explain the Fourth Gospel's composition-history must explain the motivations of the anonymous Christians who produced the current version of the text, as well as its prior editions or sources, in terms of the social dynamics of ancient media culture. Until these questions can be adequately answered, and in view of the present absence of a more historically viable alternative, it seems most reasonable to view the Gospel of John as what it presents itself to be: a unified story whose style, presentation, and theological perspective are at times baffling to modern readers, yet possessing in itself a logic innate to the media culture in which it was produced.

How Johannine Signs Signify (or Don't)

Harold W. Attridge

For many readers, particularly since the landmark commentary of Raymond Brown, the Gospel according to John falls into two major segments: the “Book of Signs,” chapters 1–12, and the “Book of Glory,” chapters 13–20. Only two deeds of Jesus are formally designated as “signs,” the wine miracle at Cana (2:1–11) and the healing of the royal official’s son (4:46–54). Yet the first conclusion of the Gospel (20:30–31), which summarizes the contents of the work as some of the many “signs” that Jesus did, suggests that more things are involved than the first two miracles. The other deeds of Jesus in the first twelve chapters, including his “cleansing” of the Temple as well as his miraculous healings, may count as signs, and it is likely that events beyond chapter 12 also do so. The event of the crucifixion could be construed as the foremost “sign” in the story of Jesus, even if it is not explicitly named as such. So too, the footwashing at the Last Supper (13:1–20), which certainly points ahead to the crucifixion, might also be a meaningful “sign.” However many they may number, the things Jesus does throughout the Gospel can readily be understood as “signs” that he performs.¹

But exactly what constitutes a “sign” has been a matter of considerable debate.² At one level, and perhaps, as many have suspected, in a source

1 Alan Culpepper has made significant contributions to the study of the Gospel of John, above all his *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, which was a groundbreaking work that called attention to the literary dynamics at work in this classic Christian text. It is a pleasure to make a small contribution to the conversation that his work has inaugurated.

2 Scholars who have wrestled with the significance of “signs” include Peter Riga, “Signs of Glory: The Use of ‘Semeion’ in St. John’s Gospel,” *Int* 17 (1963): 402–10; Sebald Hofbeck, *Semeion: Die Bedeutung des ‚Zeichens‘ im Johannesevangelium unter Berücksichtigung seiner Vorgeschichte*, 2nd ed., Münsterschwarzacher Studien 3 (Münsterschwarzach: Vier Türme Verlag, 1970); Marinus de Jonge, “Signs and Works in the Fourth Gospel,” in *Miscellanea Neotestamentica*, ed. Tjitze Baarda, A. F. J. Klijn, and Willem C. van Unnik, NovTSup 48 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 107–25; Leon Morris, “The Relation of the Signs and the Discourses in John,” in *The New Testament Age: Essays in Honor of Bo Reicke*, ed. William C. Weinrich (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 363–72; Marianne Meye Thompson, “Signs and Faith in the Fourth Gospel,” *BBR* 1 (1991): 89–108; Analisa Guida, “From *Parabolē* to *Sēmeion*: The Nuptial Imagery in Mark and John,” in *Between Author and Audience in Mark: Narration, Characterization, Interpretation*,

document underlying the Gospel,³ “signs” could be construed as portents of eschatological significance, part of the dynamic duo of “signs and wonders.”⁴ That potent pair could also characterize, in other texts, what Moses did in Egypt (Acts 7:36), what Jesus did in first-century Palestine (Acts 2:22), and what his disciples did in imitating him.⁵ Yet Jesus in the Fourth Gospel seems to be critical of such wondrous signs and those whose faith rests on them (John 4:48). Moreover, the wondrous signs that he does throughout the Gospel are never labeled with that well-worn combination of “signs and wonders.” For the evangelist, then, the “signs” that Jesus does are probably not simple miraculous portents, although they may well point to an eschatological present, nor, for all their awesome character, are they simply “wonders.”

Among the many possible senses that σημεῖον might have,⁶ it could refer to a “standard” or a “token” that identifies the one who brings or displays it.⁷ It is intriguing that the second appearance of the word σημεῖον in the Gospel appears shortly after the miracle at Cana. When Jesus throws the merchants and moneychangers out of the Temple (2:18), “the Jews” ask him what σημεῖον

ed. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 103–20; Gilbert van Belle, “The Resurrection Stories as Signs in the Fourth Gospel: R. Bultmann’s Interpretation of the Resurrection Revisited,” in *Resurrection of the Dead: Biblical Traditions in Dialogue*, ed. Geert von Oyen and Tom Shepherd (Leuven, Paris, Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2013), 249–64.

3 On the “signs source” as the origin of the equation of “signs” and miracles, and the consequent meaning of σημεῖον, see Robert Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel*, SNTSMS 11 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); and Fortna, *The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor: From Narrative Source to Present Gospel*, Studies in the New Testament and its World (Edinburgh: T&T Clark; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989); W. Nicol, *The Semeia in the Fourth Gospel: Tradition and Redaction*, NovTSup 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1972). Most recently Urban C. von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), finds in the first of three editions of the Gospel the distinctive use of “signs” for “miracles.” For criticism of the hypothesis: Gilbert van Belle, *The Signs Source in the Fourth Gospel: Historical Survey and Critical Evaluation of the Semeia Hypothesis*, BEThL 116 (Leuven: Peeters, 1994) in general, and for particular cases, van Belle, “The Meaning of σημεῖα in Jn 20,30–31,” *ETHL* 74 (1998): 300–25; and van Belle, “The Signs of the Messiah in the Fourth Gospel: The Problem of a ‘Wonder-Working Messiah,’” in *The Scriptures of Israel in Jewish and Christian Tradition: Essays in Honour of Maarten J. J. Menken*, ed. B. J. Koet, S. Moyise, and J. Verheyden, NovTSup 148 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 159–78.

4 Matt 24:24; Mark 13:22; Acts 2:19; 2 Thess 2:9.

5 Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 14:1; 15:12; Rom 15:19; 1 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:4.

6 For basic lexical data, see Karl Rengstorff, “σημεῖον,” *TDNT* 7 (1971): 200–69.

7 The usage has precedent in early Christian tradition: Matt 24:3, the “sign of the coming Son of Man”; Paul’s (or Pseudo-Paul’s) signature mark (2 Thess 3:17). On this meaning, see especially Hans Förster, “Der Begriff σημεῖον im Johannesevangelium,” *NovT* 58 (2015): 47–70.

he might show them “that he does these things” (ὅτι ταῦτα ποιεῖς). Their question seems to be asking for some symbol that would authorize Jesus to take the action he has taken. Jesus’ response, promising his restoration of a destroyed sanctuary (ναός), a truly wondrous deed, whichever “sanctuary” is meant, seems to suggest that a “sign” is indeed a miraculous occurrence. But as so often happens in this ironic gospel, his interlocutors misunderstand Jesus’ comment. The Jews, quite naturally perhaps, believe that Jesus is talking about the sanctuary of the Temple, while the narrator informs readers that he is referring to his body (2:21), something that his disciples later creatively “remembered.”⁸ When it comes to understanding “signs,” misperceptions happen. Is there perhaps a misperception on the part of Jesus’ interlocutors that the “signs” Jesus performs are simple “tokens” of his status?

While σημεῖον has a particularly broad semantic range, an intriguing alternative to the association with the miraculous or extraordinary that the phrase “signs and wonders” evokes is the use of the term in philosophical sources.⁹ Aristotle defined a σημεῖον as a “demonstrative premise that is generally accepted”¹⁰ and applied the term to the basis of plausible argument, as opposed to a certain proof.¹¹ For Plato, the term can mean “proof.”¹² Epicurean philosophers of the Hellenistic period had a more positive notion, since they argued for the invisible (atoms or the theory that explains an eclipse) from “signs” that were visible. Thus a *sēmeion* is a “an observable basis of inference to the unobserved or unobservable.”¹³ Stoics used the notion as well, although they debated what kind of inference was involved in moving from the visible

8 For the creativity of memory, see especially Jean Zumstein, *Kreative Erinnerung: Relecture und Auslegung im Johannesevangelium*, 2d ed. (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2004).

9 For earlier treatments of possible philosophical connections, see R. Formesyn, “Le sēmeion johannique et le sēmeion hellénistique,” *ETHL* 38 (1962): 856–94; Paul Ciholas, “The Socratic and Johannine Semeion as Divine Manifestation,” *PRSt* 9 (1982): 251–65; Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, “Klartext in Bildern: ἀληθινός κτλ., παροιμία – παρρησία, σημεῖον als Signalwörter für eine bildhafte Darstellungsform im Johannesevangelium,” in *Imagery in the Gospel of John*, ed. Jörg Frey, Jan G. Van der Watt, and Ruben Zimmermann, WUNT 2.200 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 61–102.

10 Aristotle, *An. Pr.* 70a7: Πρώτασις ἀποδεικτικὴ ἀναγκαῖα ἢ ἔνδοξος. See Johannes Brachtendorf, “Semeion (Zeichen; lat.: signum),” in *Wörterbuch der antiken Philosophie*, ed. Christoph Horn and Christof Rapp (Munich: Beck, 2008), 392–94.

11 See *An. Pr.* II 27; *Problemata* 701aa; *Sophistici Elenchi* 167b9; *Rhetorica* 1357a33, where enthymemes depend on what is likely or on “signs” (τὰ δ’ ἐνθυμήματα ἐξ εἰκότων καὶ ἐκ σημείων).

12 *Gorgias*, 520E; *Minos* 321B.

13 See LSJ 1593b, citing Epicurus, *Ep.* 2 to Pythocles (apud Diogenes Laertius 10.97), where σημεία are τὰ φαινόμενα, which must be carefully observed and not dismissed by the strength of a theory, and Philodemus, *Sign.* 27.

to the invisible. The academic skeptic, Sextus Empiricus, in arguing against inferences based on such indicators, discusses two kinds of signs. Some are what “renew an object observed.”¹⁴ Others make the “non-evident” “evident.”¹⁵ They come in two forms: signs that stimulate recollection and signs that reveal something new. Whether or not one accepts them, for philosophers of the Hellenistic period, “signs,” or at least some signs, are thus things that disclose what is hidden. This is also in fact what “signs” usually do in the Fourth Gospel.

The suggestion that “signs” have something to do with signification in some technical sense should not be surprising. The Fourth Gospel is clearly engaged in making truth claims, which are likely to involve some conceptual component. It dramatically portrays Jesus as one who came to bear witness to the truth (18:37), and it has him affirm that truth liberates (8:32). The Gospel as a whole wrestles—and makes its readers wrestle—with the question of how one comes to know the truth. The Gospel is, in short, interested in making a complex epistemological claim. Part of the Gospel’s epistemological project involves an exploration of how names work, especially a name used of God.¹⁶ Another part of the epistemological project, closely related to the matter of “signs,” is the Gospel’s play on how images work.¹⁷ While the Gospel is interested in bringing its readers to “knowledge” of the “truth,” a part of that process involves the reader’s confrontation with the fact that she just does not know certain things. Attempting to attain such knowledge is not the way to the Truth

14 Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math.* 8 (= *Adv. Log.* 2). 143. The sign that recalls something is τὸ πρὸς ἀνανέωσιν τοῦ συμπαρατηρηθέντος αὐτῷ πράγματος χρησιμεῖον.

15 The other kind of sign is τὸ ἐνδεικτικὸν τοῦ ἀδηλουμένου πράγματος. The Skeptic Pyrrho, according to Diogenes Laetius, *Lives* 9:96, simply denied that there were either “sensible” (αἰσθητόν) or “intelligible” (νοητόν) signs.

16 See Harold W. Attridge, “What’s in a Name: Naming the Unnameable in Philo and John,” in *Sybil, Scriptures and Scrolls: John Collins at Seventy*, ed. Joel Baden, Hindy Najman, and Eibert Tigchelaar (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016), 85–94; Attridge, “Stoic and Platonic Reflections on Naming in Early Christian Circles: Or What’s in a Name,” in *From Stoicism to Platonism: The Development of Philosophy 100 BCE–100 CE*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 270–89.

17 See Harold W. Attridge, “The Cubist Principle in Johannine Imagery: John and the Reading of Images in Contemporary Platonism,” in *Imagery in the Gospel of John: Terms, Forms, Themes and Theology of Figurative Language*, ed. Jörg Frey, Jan G. van der Watt, and Ruben Zimmermann, with the collaboration of Gabi Kern, WUNT 200 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 47–60; repr. in Attridge, *Essays on John and Hebrews*, WUNT 264 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 79–92.

that the Gospel proclaims.¹⁸ That the Gospel might be interested in how “signs” “signify” anything is part of the Gospel’s pervasive epistemological concern.

Like any signifiers, Johannine σημεία have a connotation, a sense that they convey, and a denotation, a reality to which they point, as was clearly the case with the misunderstood “sign” at 2:18–22. For many of the “signs” in the Gospel, there are abundant indications within the text that guide readers or hearers toward the realities to which the signs in one way or another point. Elements of the narrative or accompanying discourses shape the ways in which “signification” might occur. Often the signification is not univocal. Kaleidoscopic signs can have multiple senses and references.¹⁹ The healing of a paralytic on *Shabbat*, as the following defensive exchange makes clear,²⁰ points to the reality of Jesus’ equality with the Father, while it also foreshadows the power of Jesus to effect resurrection. The multiplication of loaves and fishes, as the Bread of Life homily²¹ indicates, points to the reality of Jesus, who is the source of life, both through his teaching and through the “flesh” and “blood” that his followers must “consume.”²² The healing of a man born blind, in part because

18 See Harold W. Attridge, “John, the Jews and Philosophy,” in *John and Judaism: A Contested Relationship in Context*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and Paul N. Anderson, Resources for Biblical Study 87 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 101–110.

19 Signs thus resemble the Gospel’s striking images: light, life, way, truth, life, etc. See n. 10 above.

20 See Harold W. Attridge, “Argumentation in John 5,” in *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts*, ed. Anders Eriksson, Thomas H. Olbricht, and Walter Übelacker, Emory Studies in Early Christianity 8 (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002), 188–99; repr. in Attridge, *Essays*, 93–104.

21 So styled since Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo*, NovTSup 10 (Leiden: Brill, 1965, 1981); Johannine Monograph Series 5 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017).

22 The two portions of the discourse have long generated speculation about the relationship between its symbolic elements. On the history of scholarship, see Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6*, WUNT 2.77 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996; Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1997; with a new introduction, outlines and epilogue, Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010). On the complex, but integrated, symbolism of the passage see Georg Richter, “Zur Formgeschichte und literarischen Einheit von Joh 6,31–58,” in Georg Richter, *Studien zum Johannesevangelium*, J. Hainz, ed., BU 13 (Regensburg: Pustet, 1977), 88–119; Diana Swancutt, “Hungers Assuaged by the Bread from Heaven: ‘Eating Jesus’ as Isaian Call to Belief: The Confluence of Isaiah 55 and Psalm 78(77) in John 6:22–71,” in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals*, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, JSNTSup, 148 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 218–51; Michael Labahn, *Offenbarung in*

of the spiritual “blindness” of the Pharisees that follows (9:40–41), points to the reality of the opening of the eyes of the mind that results from an encounter with the Truth incarnate.²³ The raising of Lazarus shows Jesus to be Lord over life and death; it foreshadows his own resurrection, and it offers a hope of resurrected life in the here and now, in the relationship between Jesus and those who believe in him.²⁴ In all of these “signs,” the sense and the referent of the signifier may well be complex but there are abundant indications in narrative and dialogue directing the reader to those ways in which the “signs” “signify.”

What obtains for most of the Fourth Gospel’s signs, however, does not obtain in the case of the first two wondrous deeds that are explicitly labeled “signs.” No subtle dialogue or obvious suggestive motifs surround the wine miracle at Cana or the healing of the royal official’s son to guide the reader into a process of reflection. Yet the absence of textual clues has not prevented interpreters from suggesting how these “signs” “signify.” Consider just the first, the miracle at Cana.

Zeichen und Wort: Untersuchungen zur Vorgeschichte von Joh 6,1–25a und seiner Rezeption in der Brotrede, WUNT 2.117 (Tübingen: Mohr, 2000); Thomas Popp, *Grammatik des Geistes: Literarische Kunst und theologische Konzeption in Johannes 3 und 6*, AzBiG 3 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2001); Jane Webster, *Ingesting Jesus: Eating and Drinking in the Gospel of John*, SBLABib 6 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2003); Mira Stare, *Durch ihn Leben: Die Lebensthematik in Joh 6*, NTA 49 (Münster: Aschendorff, 2004); Susan Hylen, *Allusion and Meaning in John 6*, BZNW 137 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2005); Meredith Warren, *My Flesh is Meat Indeed: A Non-Sacramental Reading of John 6* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015).

- 23 Michel Gourgues, “L’aveugle-né: Du miracle au signe: typologie des réactions à l’égard du Fils de l’homme,” *NRT* 104 (1982): 381–95; Michael Labahn, “Blinded by the Light’: Blindheit, sehen und Licht in Joh 9: Ein Spiel von Variation und Wiederholung durch Erzählung und Metapher,” in *Repetitions and Variations in the Fourth Gospel: Style, Text, Interpretation*, ed. Gilbert van Belle, Michael Labahn, and Petrus Maritz, BETHL 223 (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 453–509; Jörg Frey, “Sehen oder Nicht-Sehen? (Die Heilung des blind Geborenen)—Joh 9,1–41,” in *Kompendium der frühchristlichen Wundererzählungen*, Vol. 1: *Die Wunder Jesu*, ed. Ruben Zimmermann (Gutersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2013), 725–41.
- 24 Michael Labahn, *Jesus als Lebensspender: Untersuchungen zu einer Geschichte der johanneischen Tradition anhand ihrer Wundergeschichten*, BZNW 98 (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1999), 378–465; Wendy E. Sproston North, *The Lazarus Story within the Johannine Tradition*, JSNTSup 212 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001); Gilbert van Belle, “The Resurrection Stories as Signs in the Fourth Gospel”; Ruben Zimmerman, “Vorbild im Sterben und Leben (Die Auferweckung des Lazarus)—Joh 11,1–12,11,” in *Kompendium*, ed. Zimmerman, 742–63.

Unprompted by obvious pointers, readers have heard in the Cana story echoes of scripture²⁵ or have found symbolic significance in its structure and the many curious details²⁶ including Jesus' relationship with his mother, the "stone jars," and the apparent abundance of wine. However odd the details may be, how to construe them has been hotly debated. As Barnabas Lindars noted, "the possibilities are endless."²⁷ Lindars himself focused on the "new dimension of the coming of Christ, rather than with a particular aspect of its meaning."²⁸ For him, the "nucleus" of the story is the saying in verse 10, "You have kept the good wine until now."²⁹ The story is simply a sign pointing to the newness of the revelation that Jesus brings.

Another focus on novelty has a more polemical edge. Here the "stone jars" play a role, since, as the combination of the Mishnah and archeological evidence of first century Galilee suggests, they involve halakhic concerns for purity.³⁰ Lurking in the background of the stone jars could be the old wine-skins of another saying of Jesus (Matt 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37). Yet the setting of the Synoptic saying sets it clearly within the context of controversy with Pharisees (Matt 9:14; Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33). The Fourth Gospel lacks such a setting. Appeal to an intertextual allusion here to construe the "sign" as a pointer

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- 25 Roger David Aus, "The Wedding Feast at Cana (John 2:1–11), and Ahasuerus' Wedding Feast in Judaic Traditions on Esther 1," in Aus, *Water into Wine and the Beheading of John the Baptist: Early Jewish-Christian Interpretation of Esther 1 in John 2:1–11 and Mark 6:17–29*, Brown Judaic Studies, 150 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 1–37; Edmund Little, *Echoes of the Old Testament in the Wine of Cana in Galilee (John 2:1–11) and the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fish (John 6:1–15): Towards an Appreciation*, CahRB 41 (Paris: Gabalda, 1998).
 - 26 M. Christudas, *The Symbolism of the Miracle of the Wine at Cana (Jn 2:1–11): An Exegetico-Theological Study* (Rome: Pontificia Studiorum Universitas a Sancto Thoma Aquina, 2004); Ansgar Wucherpfennig, "Die Hochzeit zu Kana: Erzählperspektive und symbolische Bedeutung," *TheoPhil* 79 (2004): 321–38.
 - 27 Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1972; repr. Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1977), 123.
 - 28 Lindars, *Gospel of John*, 123.
 - 29 Lindars, *Gospel of John*, 126, follows Rudolph Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, trans. Kevin Smyth, 3 vols. (London: Burns & Oates; New York: Crossroad, 1968–82), who identifies the verse as the "essence" of the story.
 - 30 Roland Deines, *Jüdische Steingefäße und pharisäische Frömmigkeit: eine archäologisch-historischer Beitrag zum Verständnis von Joh 2,6 und der jüdischen Reinheitshalacha zur Zeit Jesu*, WUNT 2.52 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993); Jonathan L. Reed, "Stone Vessels and Gospel Texts: Purity and Socio-oconomics in John 2," in *Zeichen aus Text und Stein: Auf dem Weg zu einer Archäologie des Neuen Testaments*, ed. S. Alkier and Jürgen Zangenberg, TANZ 42 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 381–401.

to the supersession of old halakhah is unconvincing, and the story itself lacks any clear indication of such a concern.³¹

Other interpreters focus on the abundance of the wine that Jesus produces, often judged to be excessive,³² although even that judgment has been challenged on the basis of evidence for domestic facilities for the storage of large quantities of wine.³³ Whether the wine is excessive may be debated; that it is abundant for the needs of the wedding seems secure. Some find in this oenological abundance an allusion to³⁴ or perhaps even polemic against a rival cultic tradition, the worship of Dionysus.³⁵ Interpretation of the significance of the sign and its pointed referent usually depends on an account of the larger religio-historical context and the role of Dionysus in it,³⁶ and at times on a source critical analysis of the Gospel's development.³⁷ Since it is difficult

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- 31 Another attempt to find a polemical dimension to the story is A. Geyser, "The semeion at Cana of Galilee," in *Studies in John: Presented to Dr. J. N. Sevenster on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. W. C. Unnik (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 12–21, who implausibly sees it as directed against the purification ritual of John the Baptist.
- 32 So Martin Dibelius, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1959) 98–99; Silke Petersen, "Wein im Überfluss (Die Hochzeit zu Kana)—Joh 2,11," in *Kompendium*, ed. Zimmermann, 669–80.
- 33 See Hans Förster, "Die Perikope von der Hochzeit zu Kana (Joh 2:1–11) im Kontext der Spätantike," *NovT* 55 (2013): 103–26; and Förster, "Die johanneischen Zeichen und Joh 2:11 als möglicher hermeneutischer Schlüssel," *NovT* 56 (2014): 1–23.
- 34 E. Linnemann, "Die Hochzeit zu Kana und Dionysus," *NTS* 20 (1974): 408–18; Martin Hengel, "The Interpretation of the Wine Miracle at Cana: John 2:1–11," in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird*, ed. Lincoln D. Hurst and N. T. Wright (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 83–112; repr. as "The Dionysiac Messiah," in *Studies in Early Christology*, ed. Martin Hengel (Edinburgh: Clark, 1995).
- 35 Labahn, *Lebensspender*, 120–67, for a balanced review; Peter Wick, "Jesus gegen Dionysos? Ein Beitrag zur Kontextualisierung des Johannesevangeliums," *Bib* 85 (2004): 179–98; W. Eisele, "Jesus und Dionysos: Göttliche Konkurrenz bei der Hochzeit zu Kana (Joh 2,1–11)," *ZNW* 100 (2009): 1–28.
- 36 Critics of a Dionysiac allusion have questioned whether the cult was indeed a rival to Johannine believers, especially if they were at some point in Israel. Yet evidence of things Dionysiac possibly relevant to the Gospel can readily be found. On the importance of Euripides' *Bacchae* in the period, see now Courtney J. P. Friesen, *Reading Dionysus: Euripides' Bacchae and the Contestations of Greeks, Jews, Romans, Christians*, STAC 95 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015). For evidence of Dionysiac imagery in Palestine and reactions to it, see James M. Scott, *Bacchius Judaeus: A Denarius Commemorating Pompey's Victory over Judaea*, NTOA/StUNT (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015).
- 37 See Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Dionysian Gospel: The Fourth Gospel and Euripides* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017).

to construe the whole Gospel as an anti-Dionysiac tract, the wine miracle is located at an early stage of the Gospel's development. But if that is where the "sign" resides, does it have any significance for the constellation of signs in the Gospel's mature form? Ancient stories of wine miracles may lie in the background of John 2, but that the story engages with them as part of efforts to convey some (anti-Dionysiac) sense or point to some rival (Dionysiac) referent is unlikely.

Another option that the "sign" of abundant wine might evoke is the banquet of the Messianic or eschatological age,³⁸ such as that described in Isa 25:6–8. The "glory" that the disciples of Jesus glimpse in this event (2:11) is a beam of light from that glorious reality that is somehow beginning to dawn. The event as a "sign" would point to that reality, and it conveys something of the joy that it will bring. Yet, as such a sign, this too is imperfect, since Jesus and his disciples here do not eat, drink, or make merry. Jesus is not the "drunkard and glutton" that he is accused of being in the Synoptics (Matt 11:19; Luke 7:34), and he does not recline at table with publicans and sinners (Matt 9:10; 11:19; Mark 2:15; Luke 5:29; 7:34; 15:1), actions that could be construed as examples of the in-breaking Kingdom of God (Matt 21:31–32). Here Jesus transforms water to wine, and that's it.

The relationship to Jesus' mother may be illuminated by social scientific paradigms,³⁹ or it may be part of a larger program.⁴⁰ Some find the story to symbolize the relationship between the Johannine community and its Jewish source, represented by Jesus' mother.⁴¹ His curious remark to his mother (2:4) indicates the separation from the source that has taken place in the history of the Johannine community. Other details can be integrated into this symbolism. Thus, the creation of the abundant new wine indicates the new reality that Jesus brings beyond the Jewish past. Yet other interpretations focus on the practices of the community that reads the Gospel, finding in the new wine an allusion to the Passion of Christ or to the "blood" which Jesus says his disciples must drink (John 6:53).

38 Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 60: "The sign done at Cana bears witness to Jesus as the one who brings the rich fullness of the messianic age."

39 Ritva H. Williams, "The Mother of Jesus at Cana: A Social-Science Interpretation of John 2:1–12," *CBQ* 59 (1997): 679–92.

40 Judith Lieu, "The Mother of God in the Fourth Gospel," *JBL* 117 (1998): 61–77.

41 Lyn M. Bechtel, "A Symbolic Level of Meaning: John 2.1–11 (The Marriage in Cana)," in *A Feminist Companion to the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament*, ed. Athalya Brenner, *Feminist Companion to the Bible* 10 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 241–55.

While the power of Jesus to make dramatic transformations is a major feature of the Cana story, the fact that it is an account of a wedding, which Jesus attends in the presence of his mother, is also potentially significant,⁴² particularly if this sign is read against the background of the Synoptic Gospels.

The Jesus of the Synoptics is not a very family-friendly figure, but rather someone who came to bring not peace but a sword and to divide a man from his father and a daughter from her mother (Matt 10:34; Luke 12:51). That rather strident Jesus warns potential disciples as he sends them forth to heal and preach, in the Matthean version, that they cannot love their family more than him (Matt 10:37), or, in the Lukan version, that they must “hate” their fathers, mothers, wives, and children (Luke 14:26). Although the Synoptic Jesus famously prohibited divorce,⁴³ his sayings are not always favorable to marriage. The same radically disruptive voice of Jesus celebrates those who make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom (Matt 19:12). No negative sayings on marriage or family of this sort appear in the Fourth Gospel. The support by Jesus of a potentially embarrassed bridal couple would seem instead to support the institution.

Yet neither is the story a simple endorsement of marriage. The story of the wedding banquet is the first of several passages that will involve some hints of erotic attraction that could be tied to the theme of Jesus as bridegroom. These will be especially evident in the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman (ch. 4),⁴⁴ and will be felt in different ways in the vignettes of Jesus and the beloved disciple at the last supper (ch. 13),⁴⁵ and in the encounter with Mary Magdalene (ch. 20).⁴⁶ Yet in these stories too, the transformative power

42 Ruben Zimmermann, *Geschlechtermetaphorik und Gottesverhältnis: Traditionsgeschichte und Theologie eines Bildfelds in Urchristentum und antiker Umwelt*, WUNT 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 230–40.

43 Matt 5:31–32; 19:9; Mark 10:11; Luke 16:18; cf. 1 Cor 7:10–11.

44 See Harold W. Attridge, “The Samaritan Woman: A Woman Transformed,” in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Literary Approaches to Sixty-Seven Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann, WUNT 314 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 268–81.

45 See Harold W. Attridge, “Plato, Plutarch, and John: Three Symposia about Love,” *Beyond the Gnostic Gospels: Studies Building on the Work of Elaine Pagels*, ed. Eduard Iricinschi et al., STAC 82 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 367–78.

46 See Harold W. Attridge, “Don’t be Touching Me: Recent Feminist Scholarship on Mary Magdalene,” in *A Feminist Companion to John*, ed. A.-J. Levine, 2 vols. (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2003), 2:140–66; repr. in Attridge, *Essays*, 137–59.

of encounter with Jesus is also at work,⁴⁷ rendering incipient erotic attachment into service of the mission of proclaiming the gospel.

The possibility that some sort of marital symbolism is evoked by the Cana story might be supported by the “bridegroom” saying set on the lips of John the Baptist in the next chapter (3:29). John’s recognition of Jesus as the “groom,” whose voice delights the “friend of the groom,” might encourage a reader to return to the mysterious first sign and understand Jesus in its light: a “bridegroom” who does not marry, but who provides for abundant festivity. Yet is Jesus, a supplier of abundant wine, really a “bridegroom” in any sense?

Assessing the Options

As Lindars wrote and other commentators have affirmed, the options for understanding how the sign of the miracle at Cana works are almost as abundant as those who try to determine the significance of the sign. While many of the interpretations have something attractive about them, none is completely satisfactory. Objections or doubts can easily be raised to each. Perhaps this fact of the history of interpretation should be taken into account as we struggle with the meaning of the “sign.”

As several commentators have noted in recent years, the Gospel of John is rife with “riddles.”⁴⁸ The text’s riddling quality can be seen as part of Jesus’ conversation,⁴⁹ as a feature of Johannine characterization,⁵⁰ or as a tension or

47 On the transformative recognition scenes in the Gospel, see Kasper Bro Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger: Recognition Scenes in the Gospel of John*, BIS 93 (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

48 Tom Thatcher, *Jesus the Riddler: The Power of Ambiguity in the Gospels* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006); Paul N. Anderson, *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel: An Introduction to John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011).

49 See, e.g., Jan van der Watt, “John 1:1—A ‘Riddle’? Grammar and Syntax Considered,” in *The Prologue of the Gospel of John: Its Literary, Theological, and Philosophical Contexts. Papers read at the Colloquium Ioanneum 2013*, ed. Jan G. van der Watt, R. Alan Culpepper, and Udo Schnelle, WUNT 359 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 57–78; Frances Beck, “Die rätselhaften ‘Antworten’ Jesu: Zum Thema des Nikodemus-gesprächs (Joh 3,1–21),” *EvT* 73 (2013): 178–89.

50 Jean-Marie Sevrin, “The Nicodemus Enigma: The Characterization and Function of an Ambiguous Actor of the Fourth Gospel,” in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel: Papers of the Leuven Colloquium, 2000*, ed. Reimund Bieringer, D. Pollefeyt, and F. Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, Jewish and Christian Heritage Series 1 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2001), 357–69.

apparent contradiction in the conceptual affirmations of the text.⁵¹ The enigmatic dimension of the text is also apparent in the way in which it presents its key witness, a figure whose anonymity invites speculation, and stimulates engagement with the text. The fact that the Beloved Disciple's anonymity has done just that poses a lucid example in is a fact of the history of interpretation of the Gospel.⁵² As Clement of Alexandria noted in the second century, riddles entice and provoke, and that is what this gospel does in so many different ways.⁵³

I suggest that the designation of the miracle at Cana as a "sign," while perhaps rooted in traditions of labeling the miraculous deeds of Jesus and his followers as "signs and wonders," functions in a similar, riddling way. The many tantalizing touches of the brief story hint at possible ways that this sign might signify, but none of those clues provides enough evidence to identify securely either the sense or the referent of this sign. A first-time reader or hearer of the story might quickly skip over this fact, perhaps construing "sign" in a simpler fashion, but once he or she has a taste of how other signs "signify," she or he may return, as so many readers have in fact done, to probe this sign further. The probing has yielded some intriguing results, but its major result is to engage the reader in the process of probing all the "signs" to plumb the depths of their significance in her life.

Furthermore, once the recurrent reader comes to the next encounter with the language of "sign," in the question by "the Jews" at 2:18, she will appreciate all the more the irony of that exchange. Those who seek "signs and wonders" to ground and authenticate their reaction to Jesus miss the point of what they have encountered. The action of Jesus, in the creative memory of his disciples, referred not to the Temple made of stone, but to the place(s) where he dwells, and it conveys the message that there is no place in that dwelling for commercial exploitation.

51 These tensions famously appear in the seemingly contradictory affirmations regarding Christology (10:30 versus 14:28) and eschatology (5:25–29 or 11:23–24 versus 11:25–26).

52 See Harold W. Attridge, "The Restless Quest for the Beloved Disciple," in *Early Christian Voices: In Texts, Traditions, and Symbols: Essays in Honor of François Bovon*, ed. David H. Warren, Ann Graham Brock, and David W. Pao, BIS 66 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 71–80; repr. in Attridge, *Essays*, 20–30.

53 Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.4–9.

In short, the “signs” that Jesus offers perform an educative function.⁵⁴ Their studied polyvalence, or in the case of the initial signs, their deliberate and pronounced ambiguity, engages the reader—provoking reflection and stimulating a deepening encounter with the Word embedded both in flesh and in the evangelist’s words.

54 For the propaedeutical function of the characters within the narrative and of the narrative itself, see Jason S. Sturdevant, *The Adaptable Jesus of the Fourth Gospel: The Pedagogy of the Logos*, NovTSup 162 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2015). Jean Zumstein (“Die Bibel als literarisches Kunstwerk—gezeigt am Beispiel der Hochzeit zu Kana [Joh 2,1–11],” in *Geist im Buchstaben? Neue Ansätze in der Exegese*, ed. Thomas Söding, QD 225 [Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2007], 68–82, here 71) comes close to the understanding of the function of the Cana story suggested in this paper: “Joh 2,1–11 vertritt eine Stufenhermeneutik, die den Leser/die Leserin von einem elementaren und traditionellen zu einem tieferen Verständnis der Identität Christi und so zum im johanneischen Sinn echten Glauben führt.”

The Fourth Gospel: A “Spiritual” or “Theological” Gospel

John Painter

For a variety of reasons, my friendship with Alan has a memorable beginning. We first met in Durham, UK in 1979. He came with his mentor, D. Moody Smith, from Duke in Durham, North Carolina. The occasion was the 31st annual meeting of SNTS. We three shared in the Johannine Literature seminar there and often in the coming years in the formation of a new “Johannine School.” Alan had recently (1975) published the fruit of his Ph.D., *The Johannine School*,¹ and I had published *John: Witness and Theologian* in the same year.² This was not my Durham Ph.D. thesis, which was shelved when I returned from Durham to a Cathedral appointment in Sydney in 1968.³ My book was directed to students and serious readers of the Gospel and Epistles of John. More academic Johannine publications followed. I have been surprised to find that I remain in fundamental agreement with what I wrote in *John: Witness and Theologian*. That outline leaves much room for development, some of which is taken up in *The Quest for the Messiah: The History, Literature, and Theology of the Johannine Community*.⁴ *Quest* reflects the scholarly currents of the time, recognizing the evidence of a process of composition and of the conditions, contexts, and company that nurtured the distinctive Johannine writings. At the heart of *Quest* was an interpretative approach based on the structure of the Gospel and the shaping of the narratives and discourses within that structure in a process

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- 1 R. Alan Culpepper, *The Johannine School: An Evaluation of the Johannine-School Hypothesis Based on an Investigation of the Nature of Ancient Schools*, SBLDS 26 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975).
 - 2 John Painter, *John: Witness and Theologian* (London: SPCK, 1975, rev. ed., 1979; 3rd ed., Mitcham, Victoria: Beacon Hill Books, 1986).
 - 3 The unpublished thesis, *The Idea of Knowledge in the Johannine Gospel and Epistles*, offers a critique of the contrasting work of Bultmann and Dodd in the light of the then emerging texts from Qumran and Nag Hammadi.
 - 4 John Painter, *The Quest for the Messiah: The History, Literature, and Theology of the Johannine Community* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991; 2nd enlarged ed. also with Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

of composition within the Johannine community. Such approaches led to a return to the affirmation of the integrity of the compositions that lie before us, a position maintained by the earlier work of C. H. Dodd and C. K. Barrett. Yet the "return" was to take new forms.

One of the leaders in this movement was Alan Culpepper. His *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* pioneered a particular literary approach to the reading of the Fourth Gospel.⁵ This came after his earlier search for *The Johannine School* (1975), and before his *John, The Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (1994),⁶ which was a return to a searching historical study of the historical figure John and the legends his life generated. With his commentary on *Mark*, there is evidence of a return to a study in literary design, with much more, but no sign of any interest in tradition relevant to the quest of "the historical Jesus."⁷ With the current focus on *John* and the Jesus of History, I wonder where Alan stands. *Anatomy* showed no interest in sources and historicity. When it was written, this work became part of a wave of reaction against the use of so called "historical-critical methods."

This, at first, was an extreme reaction. With the rejection of authorial intention, some literary scholars left the text to the mercy of the reader/s. Every reader might then legitimately make of the text what he/she would. Although we often have no explicit indication of authorial intent, *competent* authors leave linguistic evidence for *competent* readers to follow the author's meaning. This, too, is complex. The texts with which we are concerned are written in another language, from another time, place, and culture. The more gaps of this kind there are for the reader, the more difficult the task is. It is linguistic, cross-cultural, historical, and concretely personal. Authors not only belong to a specific time and cultural context, but so do their readers. Authors and readers both have individual idiosyncrasies. Yet, as life evolved with increasing complexity, including a growing complexity of languages, gospel narratives and written correspondence functioned to make communication possible, even cross-culturally, and through time.

5 R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Literary Study in Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

6 R. Alan Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1994; rev. ed., Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

7 R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark: Smith & Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, Georgia: Smith & Helwys, 2007). See my review in *RBL* 08 (2009).

Understanding “the Other”—Understanding the Past

We humans live in a world subject to basic common conditions, with minds formed from a common human beginning, and shaped in that world. Thus we can cope with the world and temporal and cultural differences. We *learn* language to communicate with others, and we read and learn from the texts from other cultures and other times. For obvious reasons, the process is easiest when dealing with different living languages and cultures because the gaps are fewer and the possibility of correction lies at hand. As far as the past is concerned, the more distant, the more gaps in the process, the greater is the possibility of getting it all wrong. Then we need a way back to correct what we had lost or missed.

The Qumran discoveries provided a way back to correct our misreading of Second-Temple Judaism: the Jewish context in which the Jesus movement was born. I suspect that my generation, the generation of the Qumran discoveries and continuing decipherment, is most vividly conscious of the reality of this transformation. Of course, there were connections with the Judaism that came before and after this period. But this Jerusalem/Temple-centred form of Palestinian Judaism was distinctive and complex in ways that were obliterated as a consequence of the destruction wrought in the suppression of two Jewish revolts. If the first revolt saw the destruction of Jerusalem (70 CE), including the Temple, the second brought an end to the Jewish state (135 CE). This more or less coincided with the end of the Hellenistic Age and the emerging dominating Roman world, though the dominance of Greek language would continue for some time, especially in the Eastern Empire.

Tradition and the Role of John the Beloved Disciple

The current quest to establish the apostolic authorship of the Gospel of John is understood differently from the perspective of Westcott who, in 1880, laid out in narrowing concentric circles the classical form of the argument that the author of the Fourth Gospel was a Jew, a Jew of Palestine, an eye-witness, an Apostle, St. John.⁸ Westcott affirmed the traditional view that the Gospel was the product of long years of reflection and expressed in terms of theology at the end of the first century. His view of the Gospel finds an echo with C. H. Dodd, who wrote that, should he be proved wrong, and John the Apostle turn out to

8 B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St John: With Introduction and Notes* (London: John Murray, 1880, 1882).

be the author, then the tradition going back to him had been shaped in oral transmission in his ministry in preaching, teaching, and liturgy before taking literary form.⁹ Dodd was not backing away from his rejection of Johannine authorship. He was asserting that, whoever was the author, the evidence of the Gospel made clear that it was a late literary production of tradition that had been subject to long and deep reflection in oral transmission in the life of a believing community. Both Westcott and Dodd were well aware of the differences between John and the Synoptics.

At this point, I draw on Alan's conclusion to his question, "Who was the Beloved Disciple?" He concludes that this figure was both individual and symbolic, idealized, distinguished from John, as a Judaeon with a house in Jerusalem, but an otherwise unknown disciple.¹⁰ I note that this disciple is only identified as author in John 21, a chapter that seems to have been added after his death (implied by vv. 23–24). It also seems unlikely that "Beloved Disciple" was used as a self-identification by the author in the body of the Gospel. It might have been added there also (with chapter 21) in editing for publication by another hand (or hands). The author's identity is not revealed in the body of the Gospel by the role of the narrator, and even the Epilogue leaves the author strictly anonymous. There is no evidence of the identification of the Beloved Disciple and author with John the Apostle prior to Irenaeus and the emergence of the four Gospel canon. The appeal to early Johannine papyri that might push the identification of John earlier has been blunted by a series of articles by Brent Nongbri. He argues that, without external evidence to pinpoint the dates of the relevant papyri, a range needs to be allowed between the end of the first quarter of the second century and the early fourth century.¹¹

The persistent quest to find in the Fourth Gospel an early historical tradition, at least as early and reliable as tradition found in the Synoptics, is often linked with the continuing advocacy of John the Apostle as the Beloved Disciple, bearer of authentic living gospel tradition and author of the Fourth Gospel. This identification seems to be driven by the need to establish its historical

9 C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 10–18 and especially 17 n. 1.

10 Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 72–85.

11 See his articles: Brent Nongbri, "The Use and Abuse of P⁵²: Papyrological Pitfalls and the Dating of the Fourth Gospel," *HTR* 98 (2005): 23–48; "The Limits of Paleographical Dating of Literary Papyri: Some Observations on the Date and Provenance of P. Bodmer II (P⁶⁶)," *Museum Helveticum* 71 (2014): 1–31; and "Reconsidering the Place of Papyrus Bodmer XIV–XV (P⁷⁵) in the Textual Criticism of the New Testament," *JBL* 135 (2016): 405–37.

credentials and to show that the Synoptics and the Gospel of John provide complementary accounts of Jesus' mission to renew Israel. The first evidence of this argument is provided by Eusebius *HE* 3.24.1–13.

Early Testimony to Johannine Authorship

The testimony of Irenaeus is probably the earliest (circa 180 CE) and most important (*AH* 3.1.1; 5:33.4; cf. *HE* 5.8.2–4; 3:39.1). The Muratorian Canon, like Irenaeus, adopts the canonical order, which Irenaeus treats as the chronological order. Clement of Alexandria also treats John as last, but makes the two Gospels with genealogies first, followed by Mark and John (*HE* 6.14.4–7). Clement is clear, and like Irenaeus affirms, “Last of all John.”¹² Irenaeus is alone in asserting that his links with Papias and Polycarp provide direct connection with John the Apostle (*AH* 5.33.4), an understanding that Eusebius disputes (*HE* 3.39.2–13). But Irenaeus nowhere claims the testimony of Papias or Polycarp as the source of his knowledge of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. Did Irenaeus get the relation of Papias to John the Apostle wrong, as claimed by Eusebius? Is there an undetected testimony of Papias to the circumstances of the writing of the Fourth Gospel in *HE* 3.24.1–13?

The Quest for an Early “Orthodox” Testimony to the Gospel of John

Evidently, aware of the disputed state of evidence concerning orthodox use of John before 150 CE, Charles Hill attempted to show that Eusebius preserved an unidentified testimony of Papias to the circumstances of the composition of John and Luke.¹³ The putative source attempts to reconcile apparent chronological and historical conflicts between John and the Synoptics and to assert the historical reliability of both John and the Synoptics. No such testimonies are preserved or referred to in any ancient source. The preservation of Papias' testimonies to Matthew and Mark by Eusebius in *HE* 3:39.14–16 has led to the assumption, or wishful thinking, that he must have left testimonies to Luke and John as well. If Eusebius had known of such testimonies, they would have appeared in *HE* 3:39, where he deals with the writings of Papias. There (*HE* 3:39.1), Eusebius refers to the five volumes of Papias on *The Sayings of the*

12 Clement's reference could be late second or early third century, while the Muratorian Canon could be as early as late second century or as late as the fourth century.

13 See Charles Hill, “What Papias said about John (and Luke),” *JTS* 49 (1998): 582–629; and also his *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 385–96.

Lord Explained. In order to show that these comprised his total works, Eusebius appealed to Irenaeus, *AH* 5.33.4: "To these things Papias, who had listened to John and was later a companion of Polycarp, and who lived at a very early date, bears written testimony in the fourth of his books; he composed five." He had a second motive for using this quotation because, in it, Irenaeus asserted that Papias had been an "ear-witness" of John the Apostle. Indeed, this may have been the main reason for using this quotation, because Eusebius immediately appeals to the Preface of Papias' work to show that Papias was neither an eyewitness nor hearer of the apostles, but only of one of their former pupils (*HE* 3.39.2–7).¹⁴ Explaining this takes up about one third of his treatment of Papias, which includes Papias' testimonies to Mark and Matthew. Eusebius evidently knew of no testimony of Papias to the circumstances of the writing of John because this is the place for it in the structure of his history. Irenaeus nowhere suggests that Papias provided testimony to the origin of the Fourth Gospel.

The Papias Testimony in HE 3.24.1–13?

In *HE* 3.24.1–13, Eusebius discusses the reception of the Johannine writings. He appeals to no testimonies. One reason for this relates to the arrangement adopted for *HE*. It is chronologically based on the reign of emperors correlated with the succession of bishops in the great metropolitan cities. Eusebius first deals with the time of Jesus followed by the activities of the apostles. In *HE* 3.23, Eusebius recounts a story about John the Apostle recorded by Clement of Alexandria before turning to the reception of John's writings in *HE* 3.24. The Papias testimonies are to be found in *HE* 3.39.1–17. Had Eusebius known a Papias testimony to John, he would have included it in 3.39.

The testimonies of Irenaeus (*HE* 5.8.2–4) and Clement (*HE* 6.14.4–7) were known to Eusebius. No appeal to them was needed here because, as Eusebius asserts, the Gospel of the Apostle John is universally known and received, "recognized as it is by all the churches in the world." What Eusebius claims here seems to be drawn from and constructed by the use of what was common knowledge. To this he adds "the spin" that he wanted to give to this common knowledge in response to problems that emerged at a time somewhat later than Papias, issues concerning the lack of historical accuracy in the Gospels.

14 We owe the preservation of this fragment of the Papias Preface to this quotation by Eusebius. Even if we assume that it is reproduced accurately by him, it remains open to a reading consistent with Irenaeus.

Scott Manor asserts that “Origen is the earliest extant writer to claim that the chronology of Jesus’ ministry recorded in the Gospel of John cannot be harmonized with that found in the Synoptics. Throughout the tenth book of his *Commentary of John*, Origen cites lengthy portions of all four gospels in order to highlight points of conflict that would eventually lead him to question their historical veracity.”¹⁵ It is with Origen, well known to Eusebius, that conflict between the Synoptics and John first emerges and remains an issue for Eusebius. In *HE* 3.24 he cobbles together a response in the context of setting out the received writings of John. Although Manor argues that a Papias testimony underlies this passage, he asserts that “Eusebius’ argument found in *HE* 3.24.8–13 is a thinly veiled response to Origen’s challenge to those who want to claim historical legitimacy to all four Gospel accounts. It is remarkably simple, but thorough enough to provide an explanation of the differences Origen has mentioned.”¹⁶

That being the case, there is no need of Papias, who could hardly have devised a response to Origen. A creative use of available tradition that was common knowledge to Eusebius is enough. Those who claim an unacknowledged use of an underlying and unknown testimony of Papias should note: There is no independent evidence of any testimony by Papias to the situation of the composition of the Fourth Gospel. Further, Eusebius, writing circa 320 CE, has no need of and makes no claim to base what he says in 3.24.1–13 on any particular testimony.

Eusebius continues, “Moreover, that it was reasonable for the ancients to reckon it in the fourth place can be explained thus.” For this he has the order of the four Gospels, if taken chronologically, as Irenaeus and Origen did. Eusebius knew and later quoted “Last of all John...,” found in the testimonies of Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, which could imply John’s knowledge of the others. His quotation of Clement’s words, “... John, last of all, conscious that the bodily facts [things] had been set forth in the Gospels, ... composed a spiritual Gospel,” led Eusebius to the conclusion that “The three gospels already written were in general circulation and copies had come into John’s hands. He welcomed them, we are told, and confirmed their accuracy, but remarked that the narrative only lacked the story of what Christ had done first of all at the beginning of his mission” (*HE* 3.24.7).

Eusebius appeals to no written testimony, but to hearsay regarding what “we are told.” He goes on to claim the truth of what “we are told.” It is confirmed,

15 T. Scott Manor, *Epiphanius’ Alogi and the Johannine Community: A Reassessment of Early Ecclesial Opposition to the Johannine Corpus* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 177.

16 Manor, *Epiphanius’ Alogi*, 211.

not by testimony, but by the first three evangelists restricting their accounts to the period after John's (the Baptist) arrest. He concludes, "We are told, then, for this reason the apostle John was urged to record in his gospel the period which the earlier evangelists had passed over in silence and the things done in that period by the Saviour, ... before the Baptist's imprisonment.... Once this is grasped, there no longer appears to be a discrepancy between the gospels, because John's deals with the early stages of Christ's career and the others cover the last period of His story; and it will seem probable that John passed over the genealogy of our saviour according to the flesh because it had already been written by Matthew and Luke ..." (*HE* 3.24.8–13).

Eusebius appeals to no testimony here.¹⁷ The words "We are told" are used to introduce current explanations of the apparent chronological conflicts in the Gospels. The reason for the omission of the genealogy from John is not based on anything but probability. At the same time, these conflicts/contradictions were made apparent by Origen.¹⁸ Encouraged by Clement's words, "conscious that the bodily facts [things] had been set forth in the gospels ...," but, unlike Clement, Eusebius seeks to reconcile the historical narratives of the four Gospels. Thus, he argues that John already knew the other Gospels, affirmed their accuracy, and set out to fill gaps, especially in the early period before the arrest of John the Baptist, a period not covered in them.¹⁹ Eusebius asserts that John is historically as accurate as they are but covers different periods and events. Eusebius ignores Clement's contrast of the character of John from the other Gospels, though this is clear when he deals with Clement's view in *HE* 6.14.5–7. In deference to Clement, he goes on to say that it is natural that John should pass over in silence the genealogy and nativity of Jesus "and begin with the proclamation of His divinity, since the Holy Spirit had reserved this for him" (*HE* 3.24.13). Eusebius, recognizing the obvious conflicts, seeks for ways to reconcile them, working selectively with the common views of his day to produce his desired outcome, even if it is in conflict with the testimony of Clement.

Absence of a Papias testimony to Luke and John does not suggest that one lies hidden somewhere (e.g., in *HE* 3.24). Eusebius would not have failed

17 Manor, *Epiphanius' Alogi*, 179, says misleadingly, "Eusebius attributes to an unspecified source a similar account of John collecting and verifying earlier gospels (*HE* 3.24.7). That this original record most likely came from Papias will be discussed in the following chapter." See pp. 200–211.

18 See Manor, *Epiphanius' Alogi*, 177–85, especially 177, 184–85.

19 Indeed, Mark 1:14 strongly implies that Jesus' ministry did not begin until John had been "arrested."

to call on an early testimony (if 3.24.1–13 contains such), especially as it so conveniently agreed with his own views. Rather, unencumbered by known traditional testimonies, Eusebius *shaped his own synthesis to provide his response to problems raised by Origen concerning the conflicts between the narratives of the four Gospels*, most obviously with the narrative of *John*. But these conflicts cannot be avoided by simply consigning John to the ministry of Jesus prior to the imprisonment of John (the Baptist).

Recognition of the problem of the historicity of the narratives of the Gospels, especially the Fourth Gospel, is not a product of modern times and the rejection of apostolic authorship. The twentieth-century scholar who did most to restore a recognition of an independent historical tradition in the Gospel of John, C. H. Dodd, rejected its apostolic authorship.²⁰ He also placed severe restrictions on the kind of historical “evidence” we can expect and claim from oral tradition.²¹

The Nature of History in the Gospels

In the study of the Gospels there is a tendency to expect them to adhere to our standards of biographical and historical writings. C. H. Dodd’s work on the oral transmission of the gospel tradition in the preaching, teaching, and liturgical life of the early “Christian” communities makes this expectation unrealistic. J. D. G. Dunn also broadly adopts this view in his *Jesus Remembered*.²² Both recognized the limits that oral transmission imposes on chronological accuracy.

Gospels and Biographies

Since Richard Burridge revived the view that the Gospels belong with biographical literature, this genre has often been used to assert the historical character of the Gospels, including John.²³ However, ancient biographies differ

20 Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 17 including n. 1.

21 See, for example, C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 448; *Historical Tradition*, 157 and n. 2.

22 James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making, Volume 1* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003). For Dunn’s debt to Dodd, see my “The Fourth Gospel and the Founder of Christianity: The Place of Historical Tradition in the Work of C. H. Dodd,” in *Engaging with C. H. Dodd on the Gospel of John: Sixty Years of Tradition and Interpretation*, ed. Tom Thatcher and Catrin H. Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 257–84, especially 275–78.

23 Richard A. Burridge, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 2004).

from modern biographies in many ways. Ancient biographies varied from the novelistic, but none aspired to the best standards of modern historiographical and biographical composition. It is only with Eusebius that we see the emergence of the identification of sources with some regularity and accuracy. Even there, in the fourth century CE, the standard of reference and quotation falls short of best modern practice, and the Gospels do not match the practice of Eusebius. They may helpfully be classified as ancient biographies, and, as such, they form a distinct sub-group, identified as Gospels. The four Gospels have more in common with each other than with other similar compositions from the second half of the first century and later. The degree of difference remains a matter of hot debate, but the Gospel of Thomas, which is closer to first-century compositions than the rest of the other Gospels are, has more in common with the putative source "Q" than with the four Gospels.

Further, the first three Gospels are called the Synoptics, being more closely connected with each other than with the fourth. There is a need to assess critically the similarities and differences between the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel. Their use of sources is evident, and their varying degrees of theological interpretation and assimilation are comparable. That each of them is developed distinctively, while using identifiable common material, is widely recognized because their common material uses a high proportion of common language, especially when reproducing the teaching of Jesus. While not without differences, these three Gospels stand together with a roughly common order and shared traditions over against the Fourth Gospel. This was seen at least from the second century. In the fourth century, Eusebius attempted to obscure the difference in *HE* 3.24.1–13, although he later notes it without dissent, *HE* 6.14.4–7. The Jesus of the Synoptics speaks with a different voice than the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel. My essay argues that recognition of the Gospel of John as the spiritual or theological Gospel, in contrast with the *more straightforward* Synoptics, is the traditional case.

C. H. Dodd and the Problem of History in the Fourth Gospel

With the publication of the second of C. H. Dodd's great twin volumes on the Fourth Gospel, a new phase in Johannine scholarship opened up. If the first could be seen as a consummation of the achievements of English-speaking scholarship of the previous 50 years, the second initiated some of the changes of the next 50 years. Although Dodd retained his view that the author was not John the Apostle, as tradition would have it, he asserted that the Fourth Gospel was independent of the Synoptics, drawing on an

independent stream of Synoptic-like oral tradition. It certainly was not clear, at the time of its publication, that the swing this book encouraged would take the directions it has. There have been moves to date John early, and as a rival to the historical picture of the Synoptics, although tradition, accepted by Dodd, has it as fourth.

The Character of the Fourth Gospel

Dodd begins *Historical Tradition* with a discussion of the nature of oral tradition and its bearing on historical reporting, especially concerning the order of the narratives in the Gospels. Although he recognizes an order preserved by the oral kerygma, this is rudimentary and of little help in reconciling the differences between John and the Synoptics. As far as the Fourth Gospel is concerned, he argued, "the arrangement of the narrative in the Fourth Gospel is now widely regarded as dictated by the order of thought much more than by the order of events."²⁴ But that does not leave the field clear to assert that the order of the Synoptics is historical. Indeed "the three" differ in detail and in the order of events. They remain subject to the constraints of the oral transmission of tradition. The dominant theory of Synoptic relations implies that the order of Mark underlies Matthew and Luke but was not slavishly followed by either of them. The Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel make use of historical tradition, but the tradition underlying the Synoptics is more easily detected than is the case in the Gospel of John. Dodd has made this point emphatically.²⁵

Before Dodd's two classic volumes, the study of the oral tradition of the Gospels had largely focused on the Synoptics. Dodd applied Form Criticism to the Fourth Gospel. It is, however, true that, although he rejected the case for dependence on any of the Synoptic Gospels, he adopted the character of the Synoptic tradition so as to identify independent Synoptic-like tradition in the Gospel of John. It is important to note the scope and significance of what he claimed. *First*, he emphasises the *assimilation* of oral tradition in the Fourth Gospel, making it difficult to identify and fragmentary in its character. *Second*, given the difficulty of identification, he asserts that what he has identified should be seen as "this at least," not "this and no more." Nevertheless, what was not yet identified cannot be used for historical reconstruction! *Third*, recognizing the oral transmission of the tradition, he argued that the order of the *kerygma* was the only guide to the historical order of the life of Jesus. This is of limited help. *Fourth*, as far as this Gospel is concerned, as mentioned above,

²⁴ Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 10.

²⁵ Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 5.

the Johannine story of Jesus is ordered more by the evangelist's thought than by the order of events.²⁶

When writing *John: Witness and Theologian* in the early 1970s, I was unaware that what I wrote on pages 7–9 about the "nature of the Fourth Gospel" owed so much to Dodd.²⁷ The first short paragraph of my book, on "The Nature of the Fourth Gospel," reads:

What kind of book is the Gospel of John? It is a profound interpretation of the gospel events. But it is not true to say that John gives a developed theology while the other Gospels give us the gospel history. We need to take account of the theology of the Synoptics and the historical content of John. Each of the evangelists was a theologian in his own right. In John theological reflection has progressed beyond the limits of the Synoptics. It has reached a stage where the sources can no longer be detected with any certainty. Discourse and narrative are expressed in the same style and bear the impress of the mind of the evangelist. In spite of this monolithic unity, almost all of the important Johannine themes can be found, in seed form, in the Synoptics.²⁸

I believe that the influence of Dodd is also evident on C. K. Barrett. He was a student of C. H. Dodd before World War II, when Dodd still accepted the dependence of the Fourth Gospel on the Synoptics. Dodd's appreciation of the outstanding theological achievement in the Johannine Gospel remains clear. Barrett rated the author of the Fourth Gospel to be a theologian second only to Paul, and he would remind me that he himself was also a student of Sir Edwyn Hoskyns and F. N. (Noel) Davey.²⁹ Like these three scholars, Barrett recognized the theological character of the Fourth Gospel and argued that theological interpretation is grounded in historical reality.

It is important to remember how slippery "historical" language is. It can be used to refer to an actual "happening," an historical event. It can also refer to the discipline of reconstructing, understanding, and narrating "happenings," their causes and consequences, including the course of the lives of real people.

26 Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 10, which (in n. 1) also refers the reader to his *Interpretation*, where "the subject is treated at length."

27 I became aware of this when writing my chapter for *Engaging with C. H. Dodd and the Gospel of John*. See note 22 above.

28 Painter, *John: Witness and Theologian*, 7. Indeed, the whole short section (7–9) is relevant.

29 Barrett pays special tribute to these three scholars and Rudolf Bultmann in the Prefaces of his *The Gospel According to St John* (London: SPCK, 1955, 1978).

Further, the way historical reality is perceived, interpreted, understood, narrated is influenced by the understanding of reality in which the particular history is framed and expressed. In this sense, there is no bare history, only interpreted history. To be meaningful, there is always a balance between event and point of view, or interpretation. The more an interpretation accords with conventional views, the more that interpretation seems to be self-evident. For early Christian theology, the frame of scripture was crucial for theological interpretation. Interpretation involves narrated history interpreted by scripture and an implicit evolving worldview (*Weltanschauung*). In the Fourth Gospel, the interpretation of narrated history in the oral tradition was taken further, and theological interpretation more comprehensively entwined the divine reality in the narrated story. While all four Gospels were written in the light of the belief that Jesus arose from the dead, every part of the Johannine narrative, from the beginning, is infused and illuminated by the light of the divine presence in the story. This much is made clear in the Prologue (John 1:1, 14, 18). The Fourth Gospel moves to a new key—a new set of terms—the Johannine vocabulary, which sets it apart from the Synoptics.

I have already argued that the difference between the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptics is marked by the visibility of tradition in the Synoptics and its assimilation in the unified theological interpretation of the Fourth Gospel. That is *not to deny* authorial intent to each of those Gospels, but it is less intrusive, extensive, and cohesive in the Synoptics than in the Johannine Gospel, as Dodd affirms.³⁰

Oral Tradition and Authorship

Both *Interpretation* and *Historical Tradition* build on Dodd's conclusion that the author of the Fourth Gospel was not John the Apostle, not an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus, but made use of the living stream of oral tradition. So confident was he about the character of the tradition discernible in the Fourth Gospel that he argued that, should the unlikely possibility of authorship by John the Apostle turn out to be correct, then that tradition must have been shaped in the preaching, teaching, and liturgical life of the Apostle in that community.³¹ Without disregarding early tradition, the evidence of the Gospel itself takes priority. Dodd's recognition of the inconclusive nature of the Irenaean tradition, its lateness and contested features, only fuels the difficulty of the internal evidence. Evidence of the oral transmission of Synoptic-like

³⁰ Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 5.

³¹ Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 17–18.

tradition found in the Fourth Gospel is more important for Dodd than a later disputed tradition.

History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel

Over the last twenty years or so, there has been a growing concerted movement to make a case for recognizing that the Fourth Gospel preserves a complementary stream of historical tradition concerning Jesus alongside what is found in the Synoptic Gospels. This movement *grows out of*, but differs from, the later work of C. H. Dodd. Dodd's work on John was reoriented by P. Gardner-Smith's small 1938 book, *Saint John and the Synoptic Gospels*.³² Between 1938 and 1953, Dodd came to reject the view that John was dependent on the Synoptics. The change is foreshadowed in the first of his twin classic volumes, but it is only in the second (1963) that the full force of the change becomes clear.³³ Dodd does not attribute the Johannine character of the Gospel to a Johannine Jesus source.³⁴ A more recent movement attempts to establish a reliable stream of Johannine tradition, arguing that sequestering John from the historical task has led scholars to "the de-historicization of John" and at the same time to a "de-Johannification of Jesus." Here we need to ask: To what extent is Jesus Johannified in the Fourth Gospel? In what sense is the Fourth Gospel history/historical? We do well to remember that the earliest category used of these writings was "Gospel," and that the fourth was, and continues to be, distinguished from the other three.

Clement of Alexandria on the Gospels

In this context, the use of Clement of Alexandria's reference to the composition of John preserved in Eusebius, *HE* 6.14.7 calls for careful attention. There, following reference to the origin of the first three Gospels (*HE* 6.14.5–6), Clement notes that "John, last of all, conscious that the outward facts (lit. 'bodily

32 P. Gardner-Smith, *Saint John and the Synoptic Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938). Dodd's connection with Gardner-Smith goes back at least to 1936, when Dodd was elected as a fellow of Jesus College Cambridge, where Gardner-Smith was then Dean. See F. W. Dillstone, *C. H. Dodd: Interpreter of the New Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1977), 145–47. Dodd's *Historical Tradition* added detailed weight of evidence and argument to its case.

33 *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (1953); and *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (1963).

34 See Painter, "The Fourth Gospel and the Founder of Christianity," especially the two sections from 273–75.

material,' τὰ σωματικά) had been set forth in the Gospels (ἐν τοῖς εὐαγγελίοις) ... composed a spiritual Gospel (πνευματικὸν ποιῆσαι εὐαγγέλιον)."³⁵ It is difficult to reproduce Clement's contrast in the translation of the plural τὰ σωματικά because it does not describe the Synoptics in the way πνευματικὸν describes/defines the Fourth Gospel. Rather, Clement describes what they "set forth" in their Gospels, while he notes the kind of Gospel "John" composed. Describing them as "the bodily Gospels" would not be misleading, and much better than the introduction of "facts," which has no place in the Greek. Clement intended to contrast the "the bodily Gospels" with "the spiritual Gospel."

Clement was not disparaging the first three Gospels, although he clearly valued the spiritual Gospel more than τὰ σωματικά Gospels. But, for Clement, the "spiritual" presupposed the "bodily." Clement's intent was to show that John took advantage of the τὰ σωματικά character of the first three Gospels, and on that basis, "urged on by his disciples, and divinely moved by the Spirit," composed a spiritual Gospel. How much of this came as tradition to Clement? Or is based on his own judgement of the four Gospels? Regardless of which, his comments have seemed to be fitting to many readers down through the ages.

C. H. Dodd and Clement on the Gospels

C. H. Dodd commenced *Historical Tradition* with a critical review of the way some nineteenth-century scholars exaggerated the difference between the 'somatic' Synoptics and 'pneumatic' John. But Dodd considered the situation by then had "been placed in a fresh light." Before making reference to the quotation from Clement discussed above, he wrote, "That there is a real difference between them [the Synoptics and John] is a fact that has been manifest to readers of the gospels ever since the time that Clement wrote...." The quotation from Clement in Eusebius *HE* 6.14.7 follows. He goes on to say, "But the difference was exaggerated by nineteenth-century scholarship, as if the Synoptic Gospels were entirely 'somatic' and John nothing but 'pneumatic'; ..." Dodd makes clear that this is a matter of the significant contrast between the two (John and the Synoptics). "Where the Fourth Gospel differs from the others is that its interpretation is not only in different thought-forms, but is also deliberate, coherent, and in the full sense theological, as theirs is not."³⁶ While the Synoptics provide interpreted theological accounts, they retain the form and language of the Jesus tradition in a way the Fourth Gospel does not.

35 My quotation is from the text and translation by J. C. L. Oulton in the Loeb Classical Library, Vol. II (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1980), 48–49.

36 *Historical Tradition*, 4–5.

The tradition lies close to the surface in the Synoptics. It needs to be excavated, identified, and recovered in the Fourth Gospel, where the narratives, dialogues, discourses, and narrator's commentary are all written in a common style, as twentieth-century style criticism of the hypothetical sources of the Fourth Gospel has shown.³⁷ The author has assimilated sources to his own idiom and style, making the identification and recovery of sources difficult and uncertain.

Augustine on the Gospels

It is helpful to turn to Augustine, writing around 400 CE, in his work, *The Harmony of the Gospels*.³⁸ He adopts the canonical order of the Gospels, naming the first and fourth as apostolic compositions, without appealing to the apostolic links of the second and third.³⁹ He argues that the first three Gospels deal with the human temporal life of Jesus, while John sets out the true divinity of the Lord as the Father's equal. The intrusion of the divine dimension in telling the story of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel betrays the transformation of memory through reflection over a lifetime.⁴⁰ First, Augustine briefly describes the Synoptics before turning to *John*.

These three evangelists, however, were for the most part engaged with those things which Christ did through the vehicle of the flesh of man, and after the temporal fashion.⁴¹ But John, on the other hand, had in view that true divinity of the Lord in which He is the Father's equal, and directed his efforts above all to the setting forth of the divine nature in his Gospel in such a way as he believed to be adequate to men's needs and notions. Therefore he is borne to loftier heights, in which he leaves the other three far behind him; so that, while in them you see men who have their conversation in a certain manner with the man Christ on earth, in him you perceive one who has passed beyond the cloud in which the whole earth

37 See, for example, Eugen Ruckstuhl, "Johannine Language and Style: The Question of their Unity," in *Le Evangile de Jean: Sources, Redaction, Theologie*, ed. M. de Jonge (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1977), 125–47. In this Leuven paper of 1975, Ruckstuhl builds on the earlier work of Eduard Schweizer.

38 *The Works of Aurelius Augustine*, Vol. III (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1873).

39 *Works of Aurelius Augustine*, 141.

40 See John Painter, "Memory Holds the Key: The Transformation of Memory in the Interface of History and Theology in John" in *John, Jesus, and History*, Volume 1, *Critical Appraisals of Critical Views*, ed. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, S. J., and Tom Thatcher, Symposium Series 44 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2007), 229–45.

41 This is comparable to Clement's use of τὰ σωματικά.

is wrapped, and who has reached the liquid heaven from which, with clearest and steadiest mental eye, he is able to look upon God the Word, who was in the beginning with God, and by whom all things were made. And there, too, he can recognise Him who was made flesh in order that He might dwell among us; ... (144–45).

I have given only about half of the relevant passage, but sufficient to make the point. Much of what follows concerns affirming divinity in fourth-century terms. For Augustine, like Clement, John is the theological or spiritual Gospel, in contrast to the *more* historical, *somatic* Synoptics. The contrast is not modern but ancient and seems so obvious that it is strange to need to defend it today.

Conclusion

In my statement from *John: Witness and Theologian* cited above, I wrote, “In spite of this monolithic unity, almost all of the important Johannine themes can be found, in seed form, in the Synoptics.” I would now add that, relying on a distinctive range of interpretive vocabulary and strategies in the Fourth Gospel, those seeds have bloomed with great artistry and illumination, using the distinctive Johannine vocabulary and worldview to express the divine presence and activity in the story of Jesus. There is a balance of theological interpretation and historical reporting in each of the Gospels because there is no reporting without interpretation. Nevertheless, the balance towards theological interpretation is much greater and more sustained in the Fourth Gospel than in the Synoptics, where the Jesus tradition lies closer to the surface. In the narrative of the Fourth Gospel, the tradition is submerged in a Johannine worldview expressed with distinctive vocabulary.

The distance of the Synoptics from the Fourth Gospel becomes apparent from the beginning of the Prologue (John 1:1–18). The Gospel of John, like the Synoptics, tells the story of Jesus, a real human being with a family, friends, including disciples, and other connections, including enemies. However, in the Fourth Gospel the story is told theologically, from the perspective of eternity, in a way quite different from the Synoptics. All of this is given in principle in the Prologue, and the reader is frequently reminded by the narrator of the divine dimension in the main narrative and in the completed story. The reader has this dimension from the beginning, but the participants in the story, apart from Jesus, are oblivious to it. One partial exception is the man called John, sent by God to be a witness, through whom all may believe. He is the only

human actor alongside the incarnate Word in the Prologue (1:6–8, 15).⁴² From the beginning of the narrative, John knows enough to announce and reveal “the Son of God” (1:26–27, 29–34) and to bear witness to him (3:27–36) in terms comparable to the self-witness of Jesus and the impersonal witness of the narrator. It is through the man called John that all will come to believe (1:7), and it is he who directs two of his disciples to Jesus, forming the beginning of the chain of Jesus’ disciples. John and the narrator, like the incarnate Word, speak from the perspective of eternity. This perspective hardly provides access to tradition relevant to the historical Jesus. Rather, it is, self-confessedly, the expression of the memory of inspired reflection towards the end of the first century.⁴³

42 There is also, of course, the voice of the impersonal and omniscient narrator!

43 See John Painter, “Memory Holds the Key,” 238–45.

Beyond the Gospels



The Children of God and the Son of God in the Johannine Gospel and Epistles

Stan Harstine

I am honored to contribute to this volume recognizing the career of R. Alan Culpepper. It was my privilege to study with Alan at Baylor University and to serve as one of his graduate assistants at the time he was named the founding Dean of the James and Carolyn McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University. His approach to scholarship and his humble nature influenced my approach to the professional world of academics. His keen attention to detail and methodological concerns are factors that have continuously been present in my mind during my own research and writing.

Alan's 1980 *New Testament Studies* article, "The Pivot of John's Prologue," assessed the work at that time on the chiastic structure of John 1:1–18 and proposed a fifteen-level structure with the pivot at v. 12b: "he gave them the right to become children of God."¹ Although best known for its chiastic proposal, the article actually also examined the term "children of God" as it appears in other ancient literature and in Johannine writings. He further suggested that additional study is warranted on his four concluding theses, one of which states that v. 12b forms the "prologue's climactic affirmation." I accept his invitation as my contribution to this *Festschrift*.

This Hypothesis

One driving question in Johannine studies surrounds the unity of the Fourth Gospel. As Alan reflected back on a quarter century of research since *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, he noted, "I have become more convinced that John 1–21 forms a literary unity, regardless of what its composition history may have

1 R. Alan Culpepper, "The Pivot of John's Prologue," *NTS* 27 (1980): 1–31. U. C. von Wahlde describes Culpepper's work as "the most widely accepted proposal" for a chiastic arrangement. Urban C. von Wahlde, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, vol. 2 of *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 24.

been.”² Since every researcher operates from certain preconceptions, this article also assumes the literary unity of the Fourth Gospel as well as the position that the Prologue serves as an introduction to the gospel.³ As our guiding question is whether v. 12b, “he gave them the right to become children of God,” serves as the central pivot of the introduction, then the question for investigation is whether this same idea is developed throughout and serves an equally important role within the body of John’s Gospel.

Determining the relevance of this hypothesis requires several channels of inquiry. One step is to examine those places in the Fourth Gospel where the idea is specifically mentioned or alluded to. A second step is to investigate this idea in the Johannine letters. A final step will be to identify and assess any related motifs and determine whether such a privileged focus is warranted for this idea. Only after these issues have been carefully scrutinized can a conclusion regarding the relation between 1:12b and the entire gospel be determined.

“Children of God” Language

The term for children, τέκνον, appears in the Fourth Gospel a mere three times: 1:12, 8:39, and 11:52. In each occurrence τέκνον takes the plural form and is accompanied by a noun in the genitive case, either God or Abraham. Culpepper proposes “children of God” is an essential phrase and represents “the Johannine community’s self-designation.”⁴ The limited data for analysis indicates that further investigation into similar themes or allusions to this phrase is necessary.

At the same time as Culpepper was researching, writing, and awaiting publication of “Pivot,” a second essay on the children of God in John’s Gospel was

2 R. Alan Culpepper, “Designs for the Church in the Imagery of John 21:1–14,” in *Imagery in the Gospel of John: Terms, Forms, Themes, and Theology of Johannine Figurative Language*, ed. J. Frey, J. G. van der Watt, and R. Zimmerman, WUNT 200 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 369–400.

3 Not all Johannine scholars assume the literary unity of the Fourth Gospel and proceeding from such an assumption does have its logical difficulties. In *A History of the Two-Hundred-Year Scholarly Debate About the Purpose of the Prologue to the Gospel of John: How Does Our Understanding of the Prologue Affect Our Interpretation of the Subsequent Text* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2015), Harstine provides eight categories raised by critical scholarship concerning the unity of the Prologue. For a developed case against such unity see von Wahlde, *Commentary*, 17–27.

4 Culpepper, “Pivot,” 26.

published by M. de Jonge.⁵ De Jonge's article examines related concepts not covered in "Pivot" and provides insight into this phrase as it appears in this gospel. The developed concepts of de Jonge can be condensed into three categories: the origin of believers, the relationship of the believers with Jesus, and their relationship with the world.⁶ We find in de Jonge's work a transference from the word "children" to the word "believers," thus expanding the phrase, "children of God," to encompass the semantic relationships expressed in John 1:12a and c.

De Jonge discusses the divine Sonship of Jesus prior to examining the relationship between the τέκνα of God and the υἱός of God. He clearly demarcates the importance of both: "only the children of God, those who were born from God, are able to understand and follow the unique Son of God."⁷ The idea that some are "born of God" represents an essential identity component in the Fourth Gospel and places emphasis on the accompanying noun in the genitive case. That this phrase represents a mark of distinction is strengthened by the use of three negatively contrasting phrases in 1:13, not of blood, nor of a body's desire, nor of a man's will.⁸ In this fashion, the children of God are distinct because they originate in the same place as the Son of God, i.e., from God.

In describing the relationship of believers with Jesus, de Jonge focuses on themes associated with the idea of being a child, i.e. learning to act like a son or a daughter. Jesus provides the example for becoming children of God. Specifically, "the children of God" are sent in the same way that Jesus, the Son, is sent: 4:38, 17:18, and 20:21. Secondly, children are born of God only by receiving, that is, through a human decision in response to the activity of God: 1:12–13, 3:3, 7:17. M. de Jonge further distinguishes the importance of receiving when he notes, "only those who accept him [Jesus] have received what God intended to give them."⁹ Finally, the theme of sending is associated with the theme of believing: 5:38, 6:29, 11:42, 17:8 and 21. Receiving, believing, and sending are connected and necessary themes for better understanding the phrase

5 Marinus de Jonge, "The Son of God and the Children of God in the Fourth Gospel," in *Saved by Hope: Essays in Honor of Richard C. Oudersluys*, ed. James I. Cook (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 44–63. The title of my essay is an intentional reversal of de Jonge's title. Culpepper only mentions de Jonge in his postscript where he refers to another work: Marinus de Jonge, ed., *Évangile de Jean: sources, rédaction, théologie*, BETL 44 (Gembloux, Belgium: Duculot, 1977).

6 De Jonge, "Son of God," 52–57.

7 De Jonge, "Son of God," 44.

8 De Jonge, "Son of God," 52.

9 De Jonge, "Son of God," 56.

“children of God.”¹⁰ Jesus also reinforces the importance for believers to act as representatives of the Son in John 17.¹¹

The relationship of believers with the world is as complex to describe as trying to determine what connotations the Fourth Gospel associates with κόσμος each time it appears.¹² On the one hand, the world is the destination to which the Son is sent: 3:17, 10:36 and 17:18, and thus where the children of God are also sent. Yet, the world is not a place that receives the Son openly: 1:9–11, 14:17, 15:18–19, 16:1–4 and 17:14, so neither will it receive the children of God openly. Finally, there is an emphasis within the Fourth Gospel on the world as a temporary realm for living, particularly at 14:1–3 and 17:24 in the farewell discourses.¹³

As though two concurrent studies were not sufficient, a third publication also focused on this topic during the same time period. M. Vellanickal argues that the phrase ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, combined with the Greek verb εἰμί, acts as an equivalent to the phrase τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ. The phrase is uniquely Johannine when used in connection with humans, but it is never used in connection with Jesus, as it denotes the origin of the preposition’s object.¹⁴ Furthermore, Vellanickal indicates this phrase means one has been born into the divine life. He describes the Johannine perspective on this event as meaning “to enter into communion with the Father and Son.”¹⁵ The identity of children of God is recognized when their conduct reflects the likeness of their father, God.¹⁶

Vellanickal identifies “disciple” as a term synonymous with children of God. The anarthrous use of this word represents “a spiritual dependence” rather than “material participation in the terrestrial life.”¹⁷ He then concludes, “being a disciple is the advanced stage of being the children of God, producing fruits characteristic of the life of divine sonship.”¹⁸ This divine sonship, his preferred

10 De Jonge, “Son of God,” 52–53.

11 De Jonge, “Son of God,” 55.

12 On page 55, de Jonge refers to N. H. Cassem, “A Grammatical and Contextual Inventory of the Use of κόσμος in the Johannine Corpus with Some Implications for a Johannine Cosmic Theology,” *NTS* 19 (1972–73): 81–91, to indicate a reversal in the ratio of positive and negative connotations in chapters 1–12 and 13–18 from 18:9 to 7:30.

13 De Jonge, “Son of God,” 57–59.

14 Matthew Vellanickal, *The Divine Sonship of Christians in the Johannine Writings* (AnBib 72; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977), 94–95. Culpepper acknowledges the receipt of this book after his research was completed for “Pivot” and reviewed it for *JBL* 98 (1979), 447–49.

15 Vellanickal, *Divine Sonship*, 216.

16 Vellanickal, *Divine Sonship*, 263.

17 Vellanickal, *Divine Sonship*, 291.

18 Vellanickal, *Divine Sonship*, 291–92.

term for the larger image these various themes represent, remains distinct from its Hellenistic understanding because the initiative lies with God rather than with humans. Thus, in the Johannine construct, humans become children of God after they are born into this physical world, and “the divine sonship is something that is reserved to the believers, elevating them above other men, giving an individual consciousness of a personal relation to God the Father.”¹⁹

An investigation into these two contemporaneous studies quickly indicates that the idea, “children of God,” is not limited in the Johannine gospel to two appearances only, but encompasses a much broader semantic domain throughout the text. The second step for determining the relevance of this theme leads us to the Johannine letters, specifically 1 John.²⁰ What contribution does the usage in the letters make toward understanding the Fourth Gospel’s description of this theme?

“Children of God” in 1 John

As part of his survey in “Pivot,” Culpepper discusses the three passages in 1 John containing the phrase, τέκνα θεοῦ: 3:1–2, 3:10, and 5:2. He suggests that the first appearance focuses on eschatological expectations, while the second contrasts paternal origins in a fashion similar to the John 8 discussion with the Judeans. The third occasion appears in a “tightly constructed paragraph in which there is an interesting *inclusio*” focusing on the two messianic titles of Jesus from John 20: Messiah and Son of God.²¹ Yet, as we found above, this phrase is considerably larger than the mere word τέκνον itself.

Although 1 John uses two other synonyms for τέκνον: τέκνιον, and παιδίον, they only appear in the vocative case and make no contribution to this discussion. However, when we consider the conclusions by de Jonge and Vellanickal, that other phrases form the same motif as τέκνον, then 1 John becomes a more fertile garden for exploration. Although the word for disciple is absent from 1 John, the concept of the believer, ὁ πιστεύων, makes frequent appearances.

This phrase occurs three times in 1 John 5, beginning in the paragraph Culpepper identifies as “tightly constructed.” The first appearance, at 5:1, is also connected with birth language, “everyone who believes Jesus is the Messiah

19 Vellanickal, *Divine Sonship*, 360.

20 The usages of τέκνον in 2 John and 3 John do not contribute meaningfully to the discussion as they occur within a personal pronoun construct: her children, your children, your sister’s children, and my children.

21 Culpepper, “Pivot,” 25–26.

has been born from God.” The second appearance, at 5:5, associates the one who believes with Jesus’ own divine sonship within the context of conflict with the world. The third appearance, 5:10, introduces a stark contrast; those who believe have a specific, assumed as truthful, testimony while those who do not believe make God a liar—a definite reflection of the language of conflict in John 8. This third appearance occurs in the middle of a discussion centered on the testimony of God and of men. The idea that one should “receive” this greater testimony is an element of the children motif de Jonge noted.²²

Investigation into these related studies identifies evidence for a broader spectrum of motifs that undergird and support the concept “children of God.” Belief and conduct are two aspects of the structure, and they incorporate activities such as receiving and being sent within the family sphere. The final step in this inquiry involves assessing the role these other related motifs play in clarifying our main theme. Only then can we assess whether Culpepper’s proposal is warranted.

Birth Language

Although several semantic domains exist for understanding τέκνον,²³ its appearance in John 1:12 places it squarely within the range of procreation. Yet, in nearly the same breath, this discussion of birth language is reoriented to a different sphere than just the desires of male and female. The Gospel does not link the τέκνον language with a physical birth, but with a spiritual one. Furthermore, the language of John 1:12–13 solidifies the phrase “children of God” within this domain by associating believing with this new birth, two ideas recognized as central to the Gospel’s teaching.²⁴

Within 1 John, birth language is even more prevalent in relation to belief. In a section distinguishing between those who practice righteousness and those who choose otherwise, the language of birth forms a type of antithetical

22 De Jonge, “Son of God,” 52–53.

23 Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida describe these domains as: “Persons For Whom There Is Affectionate Concern” 9.46, “Kinship Relations Involving Successive Generations” 10.28 and 36, “Socio-Religious” 11.14, “Socio-Political” 11.63, “Follow, Be a Disciple” 36.40, and “Class or Kind” 58.26 (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 vols. [New York: United Bible Societies, 1988]).

24 Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters: The Word, the Christ, the Son of God*, BTNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 472–73.

inclusion.²⁵ One's life demonstrates consistency with the activities of the family into which one is born, either of God or the devil.²⁶ This letter clearly associates birth with believing in Jesus, specifically his messianic status, while at the same time associating the righteous action of love with those born into the family of God.²⁷ Other references to those born of God also substantiate the consistency of family activities, be those love, victory over the world, or being kept from evil.²⁸

Spirit of God and Birth Language

The Spirit of God enters the Johannine narrative through the testimony of John the Baptizer, whose confession identifies Jesus as the Son of God who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. John's testimony is again provided in 3:27–30, in response to his remaining disciples' concern about the rising popularity of Jesus' ministry. John confirms and advances his earlier testimony by indicating that the one sent by God will "give the Spirit beyond any ability to measure." These two testimonials by John the Baptizer, which clarify the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit, bracket the "birth from above" story involving Nicodemus.

The discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus represents the basic trope of misunderstanding present in many discourse episodes in John's Gospel. Jesus derails Nicodemus' intended conversation regarding either the signs of, or origin of, Jesus before Nicodemus can even utter his question. Jesus seemingly ignores the perhaps baited compliment by Nicodemus, namely that Jesus has come from God as a teacher. Instead, he reorients their interaction to center on God's kingdom. Entrance into this kingdom requires a new kind of birth, one of the Spirit. When Jesus identifies one's birth as the key characteristic for discerning the activities of God, Nicodemus' semantic domain is sadly limited to the sphere of human activity, specifically the involvement of a birth mother, while the Gospel's audience possesses information from 1:12–13 for properly understanding Jesus' imagery. The location of this discourse

25 1 John 2:29 and 3:9. Colin G. Kruse identifies the section, 2:28–3:10, as "distinguishing the children of God from the children of the devil." Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, Pillar NTC (Leicester: Apollos; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 49.

26 The language of this section strongly suggests an association with the language found in John 8 distinguishing between children of God and children of the devil.

27 1 John 5:1.

28 1 John 5:2, 4, 18.

on the Spirit within the broader context of John the Baptizer's testimonials should raise the issue as to whether this new birth language is synonymous with or meant to imply baptismal language.²⁹ Regardless, the key element for this essay is the central role the Spirit plays in the procreation event. Central to Jesus' discussion is the concept "like begets like."

The second discourse regarding the role of the Spirit occurs around the well near Sychar. Jesus redirects that conversation as well, this time to address the worship of God. Critical to this reorientation is his pronouncement that current forms of worship, whether in Samaria or Jerusalem, will change to embrace a new reality. Yet Jesus does not negate the woman's basic assumption that one worships according to the heritage one belongs to through birth. Samaritans and Judeans both worship, yet worship tied to such physical locations will no longer be worship of the Father. One could even infer from the broader Johannine context that this new worship only occurs among those who experience a new birth.³⁰

The third dimension for understanding the Spirit occurs after Jesus' three-part discourse on the Bread of Life. Some, if not many, of his disciples are troubled about the words they have just heard him speak. Jesus challenges them with an even more divisive vision: the Son of Man ascending to where he originated. Returning to the main theme of the discourse, the life-giving nutrients for those who receive his words, Jesus contrasts the flesh with the spirit for only the second time in the Gospel. Spirit brings life, and Jesus' words are spirit. Flesh has no use whatsoever in providing life.³¹

Overall, the topic of the Spirit enters the Johannine narrative rarely, the expectation the Baptizer's testimony places on it being pouring out beyond the ability to measure notwithstanding. Yet when Spirit does appear, three critical elements: new birth, new worship, new life-giving bread, represent a new paradigm for understanding Jesus' baptismal mode. Jesus proclaims a kingdom of God based in the realm of Spirit. Only within this reality can one understand and experience the Father.

Like our key phrase, "children of God," the thematic scope of Spirit encompasses more than mere word appearances. In case one might miss this breadth

29 Lars Hartman, "Baptism," *ABD* 1:583–94, relates the two concepts. "Depending on the way in which one regards the situation being left behind and the one being entered, such rites *can* be connected with ideas of a new birth, of a new life, or of salvation."

30 John 4:21–24. Just as the Nicodemus episode is bracketed by John's testimonies, this discussion parallels the Temple cleansing and is bracketed by the two signs performed in Cana.

31 John 6:61–64.

of meaning, the voice of the Fourth Evangelist interrupts the narrative in order to clarify Jesus' words concerning those who believe.³² Taking words set within the context of the water ceremony at the Temple, the narrator explains that these "rivers of living water" reference the Spirit, as-yet-unreleased at that moment in story time. The living water Jesus mentions would not become available until after Jesus' death and resurrection.³³

Language in John 14–16 reinforces the future dimension of the Spirit. During this extended discourse, Jesus describes the Spirit's various roles once the Spirit has been sent by the Father. Set within the context of his teaching on believing and this new life, Jesus' words indicate he will ask the Father to send this Spirit of Truth to be a helper, an advocate, an intercessor. Jesus describes one role for this Spirit as that of a teacher, who will help the disciples remember what Jesus said. A second role provides testimony about Jesus. A third part played by this soon-to-come Spirit of Truth is to guide Jesus' followers into all truth, and, in so doing, to glorify Jesus. A final activity for this Spirit can be seen in relationship to the world regarding sin, righteousness, and judgment.³⁴

The Spirit of God, so closely associated in John 1 and 3 with Jesus and birth into the kingdom of God, does not yet belong to the story time of the Fourth Gospel. Instead, it is presented as an expected character, who will only take the stage after Jesus' glorification. The audience of the Gospel is reminded that when Jesus walked the pathways of his land, those walking alongside him and seeing what he would do were not as aware of Jesus' true identity as were those who later heard their testimony, specifically because the Spirit of God was not yet part of their experience.

Culpepper's Key Criteria

The only appearance of τέκνον unattached to θεός escalates the rhetoric concerning the line of demarcation between σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ and τέκνα Ἀβραάμ. The first verbal volley builds on the differences between a slave and a son. The chiasmic structure of John 8:31–37 emphasizes this distinction at 8:35a and b, signified as E and E'. Sections A and A' provide evidence for the first of two

32 John 7:14–38.

33 John 7:39. This event may also await Jesus' ascension to the Father if such occurred between the events narrated in John 20:17 and 19. The attentive reader will recognize that Jesus' words about living water equally apply to his discussion in John 4 with the woman of Sychar.

34 John 14:17 and 26, 15:26, 16:13, and 16:7–11.

key criteria that accentuate the importance of “children of God” in the Fourth Gospel. First, based on the negative association found in John 8:37b (A’), it can be recognized that true descendants of Abraham “have Jesus’ word.” This characteristic is paired with the more common Johannine figure of speech in 8:31, (A), “abiding in Jesus’ word.”³⁵ The emphasis of Culpepper’s first criterion on the word of Jesus accentuates the discussion about the Spirit in John 6 described above.

The second criterion established by this John 8 discourse also builds on an earlier premise: “like begets like.” Children are to conduct themselves in the same manner as their father. Jesus’ discussion with his interlocutors in 8:39–47 centers on appropriate conduct, one’s response to these words of Jesus. The way true children of God respond to the word of God differs markedly from the manner in which children of other fathers respond to this same word of God.³⁶

Yet, Culpepper’s discussion does not end with the responsibility of the children. The Fourth Gospel indicates that God has fulfilled the typical paternal responsibilities of continued care and education.³⁷ The children have one duty, to obey what the Father has taught, i.e. to conduct themselves as the Father does. Yet, as we noted previously, a future element exists in the Spirit’s teaching, and thus a future timeline for learning appropriate conduct.

The expectancy associated with the bestowal of the Spirit by Jesus heightens in the passion portion of the narrative. Language in John 15 introduces a change in status for those who follow Jesus and are children of God. Jesus indicates they are friends and not servants. The demarcation between two groups discussed earlier is solidified between those who still follow him at this point in the narrative and those who stopped following him at the end of John 6 or failed to continue in his word in John 8. These who remain have become Jesus’ friends precisely because they have been educated by God; i.e. Jesus has told them everything he heard from the Father. Culpepper identifies this status of friendship as the disciples’ equality with Abraham, the friend of God.³⁸ Yet, a friend is not a sibling. The identification as brothers and sisters of Jesus only occurs after his resurrection, when he commands Mary to tell his siblings about his ascension to their shared Father, who is God. The Fourth Gospel maintains a sense of future fulfillment within the narrative’s chronology, both

35 Culpepper, “Pivot,” 27–28.

36 Culpepper, “Pivot,” 28. Vellanicall concurs, “The sonship according to Jn is manifested in conduct that shows a moral and spiritual likeness to the one who is claimed as father” (*Divine Sonship*, 356).

37 Culpepper, “Pivot,” 29.

38 Culpepper, “Pivot,” 29.

for the role of the Spirit and for this final identification as children of God and siblings to the Son of God.³⁹

Reading through Filters

A major contribution literary criticism brings for understanding biblical texts is an acknowledgement that we read these texts through filters; that is, we have preconceived ideas in our mind before we begin to read. These various filters are recognized most clearly when collisions occur between different methodological conclusions from diverse scholarly approaches. One popular filter for reading John 20 derives from its scheduled appearance in the lectionary. Often read on Pentecost Sunday, John 20:19–23 is frequently referred to as the Johannine Pentecost. This traditional filter for reading gospel accounts seeks harmony between similar episodes in the four Gospels, whether in the Synoptics themselves or, more rarely due to the few opportunities available, between John and one or more of the Synoptics. Such attempts at harmonizing the Johannine impartation of the Spirit have been described as “naïve historicism.”⁴⁰ Yet, such readings do occur. Bultmann notes, “Easter and Pentecost therefore fall together.”⁴¹ Köstenberger indicates the event refers “emblematically and proleptically to the impartation of the Spirit the disciples were to receive at Pentecost not many days from the commissioning.”⁴²

Other filters have been applied to the Johannine version of Jesus’ resurrection and impartation of the Spirit to his disciples. One filter views the moment in terms of a commissioning of the disciples.⁴³ Another filter reads John 20 as fulfilling Jesus’ words from the farewell discourse in John 14–16.⁴⁴ Indeed,

39 Culpepper, “Pivot,” 29.

40 Reginald H. Fuller, “John 20:19–23,” *Int* 32 (1978): 180–84.

41 Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray et al. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 692. He notes that “it will have to be presumed that the promise of the future bestowal of the Spirit was given in the Source, as in Luk 24.49; Acts 1:4f.” Even Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 2:1196–1200, at the conclusion of his in-depth survey of the topic, indicates that this passage “must bear in John’s narrative the full theological weight equivalent to Luke’s Pentecost.”

42 Köstenberger, *Theology*, 259.

43 Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary*, trans. John Friend (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 643.

44 R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, *Interpreting Biblical Texts* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 242–43, and Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological*

many filters, some ancient and some modern, have been suggested by various scholars since the turn of the century for use when reading John 20.⁴⁵

Perhaps the most distinctive filter is presented by U. C. von Wahlde in his work on the composition history of the Johannine gospel and letters. He locates this passage within the second of his proposed three editions of the Fourth Gospel.⁴⁶ With sharpened attention on these layers, von Wahlde describes the bestowal of the Spirit as the fulfillment of repeated promises in the Fourth Gospel and as the “crowning moment of ‘salvation’” for the disciples. Further, because he has focused on information common to a compositional layer, von Wahlde identifies this event as the “moment of ‘birth from the Spirit,’” and as “the guarantee for the believer who will also be given the same Spirit.”⁴⁷

John’s Gospel draws attention to the resurrection appearances in various ways, but primarily by emphasizing the future installment of the Spirit of God. This brief survey of some readings of John 20 confirms that the filter(s) one uses in reading the Gospel will impact how one views and understands the content in the Fourth Gospel. Our hypothesis asks whether v. 1:12b serves a role within the body of John’s Gospel as equally important as its role in the Prologue. Our final step of inquiry requires determining whether a reading based on this premise is confirmed when examining John’s Gospel as a whole?

Reading through Birthing Imagery

The publication of “The Pivot of John’s Gospel” preceded Alan’s venture into the, at the time relatively nascent, field of literary criticism and resulting

Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles, rev. ed. (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 261–65. Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, 692, also includes the idea of fulfillment in his comments.

- 45 See Raymond Johnson, “The Church’s Mission: John 20:19–23 Reconsidered,” *CurTM* 43 (2016): 22–28; Troy W. Martin, “Ancient Medical Texts, Newly Re-discovered: The Medical Background of Biblical Breathing,” *Early Christianity* 1 (2010): 513–38; Craig R. Koester and Reimund Bieringer, eds., *The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John*, WUNT 222 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); Kasper Bro Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger: Recognition Scenes in the Gospel of John*, BibInt 93 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), and Stan Harstine, “Un-doubting Thomas: Recognition Scenes in the Ancient World,” *PRSt* 33 (2006): 435–47.
- 46 Von Wahlde, *Commentary*, 858. Specifically, he associates it with the second edition’s author.
- 47 Von Wahlde, *Commentary*, 862.

publication of *Anatomy*.⁴⁸ Thus, the filters applied in that article did not reflect any of the methodological concerns Alan has become noted for over the past 35 years. What happens if one attempts to read this gospel and assess this data from a literary standpoint rather than a historical-critical framework? What conclusions might result in a reading that allows John 1:12b to serve as the pivot, not only of the Prologue, but also of the Gospel?

A first task for such a reading would include assembling the various thematic elements relevant to the category “children of God.” The linguistic facets associated with identifying this new creation include language such as believing, receiving, being sent, disciples, abiding, birthing, and language regarding the Spirit. An approach including all these elements in one’s filter could prove daunting, perhaps impossible, and it is definitely beyond the scope of this essay. However, since the phrase “children of God” is so closely associated with a birth scenario in 1:12–13, selecting birthing, especially birth in the Spirit, as a dominant filter clearly maintains the text’s connotations.⁴⁹

The discussion regarding birth between Jesus and Nicodemus, like so many others in the Fourth Gospel, displays a level of rhetorical sophistication common in the ancient world.⁵⁰ By incorporating this language of comparison between two distinct births, fleshly and spiritual, Jesus is able “to associate himself with and to define a particular group.”⁵¹ The rhetoric in the Nicodemus dialogue functions to identify two distinct groups with the goal of encouraging participation in the more beneficial group, the one that sees and dwells in the kingdom of God, and leaving the other group.⁵² Joining the new group described by Jesus requires a new type of birth, one from above that originates with God’s Spirit. Yet, the unanswered problem is, “Does the Fourth Gospel describe this birth event?” If so, where is it described?

48 R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, Foundations and Facets (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

49 Von Wahlde notes, “In the Johannine tradition, becoming a child of God is said to come about through birth from the Spirit (John 3:5) or from God (1 John 2:29, 3:9, 4:7, 5:1, 4, 18).” *Commentary*, 7.

50 George L. Parsenios, “A Sententious Silence,” in *Portraits of Jesus: Studies in Christology*, ed. Susan E. Myers, WUNT 2/321 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 16–24, argues that the rhetoric here satisfies the requirements for a Latin *sententiae*.

51 Parsenios, “Silence,” 24.

52 Parsenios, “Silence,” 24. We have seen other places in this gospel that also define these distinct groups.

The key to unlocking that mystery may lie in the Fourth Evangelist's contributions. On two specific instances related to our inquiry, the narrator's voice interjects itself into the story world and provides clarification for the meaning behind some words. The first occasion was introduced earlier during the discussion relating to the Spirit of God. In John 7:39, the narrator indicates Jesus was speaking of the Spirit, who would not be given until after Jesus was glorified. Thus, the birthing by the Spirit must occur chronologically after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The second occasion appears when the narrator comments on the words of Caiaphas following the resurrection of Lazarus. These words, described as prophetic, indicate Jesus' death would benefit the nation, but not only the nation. Jesus' death would impact the children of God overall.⁵³

Since Jesus' death is crucial both for the coming of the Spirit and for bringing the children of God together as one, the resurrection appearances of Jesus in John 20 become critical for identifying this event chronologically. Arranged into three appearance accounts: to Mary, to the disciples without Thomas, and to the disciples with Thomas, the central story found in 20:19–31 forms the “pivot” for these accounts. The words of Jesus provide additional instruction to his disciples in this episode.⁵⁴ Jesus follows his second peace wish with the language of sending—one of the identifying characteristics we observed for the children of God. He then bestows the Spirit upon them, which is immediately followed by granting them authority to act and behave like the Father with regard to the sins of others. By their conduct, they will demonstrate their status as children of God.

Reading through the lens of birth imagery also liberates Jesus' words in John 20 from an association solely with Acts 2. This language of Jesus now represents the chronological birth of siblings to the Son of God. The multiple elements associated with the children of God motif included in John 20 confirm such a reading. First, when Jesus speaks with Mary, he addresses his followers using terms of family relationship for the first time, signifying a change in their status.⁵⁵ Second, the statement that the Father sent Jesus confirms John's testimony regarding Jesus, the words of Jesus and the abundance of the Spirit, which Jesus gives.⁵⁶ Third, his commission of sending the disciples associates

53 John 11:52 is the other time τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ is used in the Fourth Gospel.

54 Talbert, *Reading John*, 262.

55 John 20:17. See discussion above under “Culpepper's Key Criterion.”

56 John 3:34. See the discussion about the Baptizer's testimonies under “Spirit of God and Birth Language.”

them with a key characteristic of the children of God.⁵⁷ Fourth, the Greek verb for breathing in 20:22 is also used in Gen 2:7 LXX for giving life to Adam and in Ezek 37:9 LXX for bringing life to the dead dry bones.⁵⁸ Fifth, Jesus' instruction to receive the Holy Spirit confirms John's testimony that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit.⁵⁹ Sixth, receiving what the parent offers is a further characteristic for children of God.⁶⁰ Seventh, their new conduct with regard to granting forgiveness solidifies their status as children of God.⁶¹ The immediate context of the resurrection accounts in the Johannine gospel, read within the boundaries of the Fourth Gospel and not in harmonization with the other canonical gospels or Acts, emphasizes that these exhortations of Jesus to "receive the Spirit" *signify the moment of birth for the children of God* in the Fourth Gospel.⁶²

In the past, others have recognized the import of this moment yet only partially due to their own particular scholarly filters.

It is equally clear that the transference into this new mode of existence is given only to the man who believes in the revelation with which he is confronted in Jesus; further that the new existence is characterized by the illumination which comes from understanding oneself in relation to God: the τέκνα θεοῦ are the υἱοὶ τοῦ φωτός (12:36).⁶³

Boismard notes, "the Spirit that the Father sends, at the request of Christ, is precisely the Spirit of the Son, and so, in receiving it, we are transformed to the image of the Son, we become ourselves Sons of God by adoption, children

57 John 20:21. See the discussion on sending from de Jonge above under "Children of God."

58 This similarity is noted by many commentators. For recent examples see von Wahlde, *Commentary*, 856, and Keener, *Gospel of John*, 2:1204–6.

59 John 1:32–33. See the discussion above, regarding baptism and its relationship to new birth under "Spirit of God and Birth Language."

60 See the discussion above on receiving from de Jonge under "Children of God in 1 John" as well as the relationship between receiving the words of Jesus and the Spirit from John 6.

61 John 20:23. In John 8–9, sin is connected with the inability to believe, i.e. see, who Jesus truly is. According to John the Baptizer, Jesus came to take away the sin of the world. See discussion above regarding conduct from Vellanickal under "Children of God."

62 As von Wahlde indicates, "For the author of the second edition, this is the moment of 'birth from the Spirit' (3:3–10)." *Commentary*, 862. Keener, *Gospel of John*, 1:403, identifies the authority of John 1:12b as "divine authorization to become what no human effort could accomplish."

63 Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, 59.

of God.”⁶⁴ Köstenberger indicates that this event, “appears to complete, symbolically, the *inclusio* between the reference to the first creation at John 1:1–4 by indicating a *new creation*—the establishment of a *new messianic community* by the risen Jesus—through Jesus ‘breathing on’ his disciples.”⁶⁵ Even M. Vellanickal, despite writing an entire manuscript on divine Sonship, i.e. being children of God, doesn’t fully note the Johannine emphasis. “In the OT it is an adoptive relationship, but in Jn it is based on a communication of a vital principle (Spirit) from the side of God which makes man a ‘child of God’ and enables him to carry on the life of sonship.”⁶⁶

Epilogue

The hypothesis for this essay can be substantiated. Culpepper’s fourth thesis, specifically that the phrase “children of God” represents a “reflection of the community’s self-understanding and a significant integrating theme for much of the Gospel of John,”⁶⁷ has been considered and validated. “Children of God” acts as a catch-phrase for several significant concepts in the Fourth Gospel. The “pivot” of the prologue, 1:12b, rests securely upon its two solid fulcrums: believing and birthing. Much of John’s narrative focuses on the significance of the first fulcrum, while the discourse with Nicodemus in John 3 and the words of Jesus in John 20:22 form an *inclusio* regarding the second. The ability to become, and then to conduct oneself as, a child of God is central to the Fourth Gospel. “Neither the incarnation nor the witness of the community that ‘we have beheld his glory’ would have enduring meaning were it not for the *result* of the confession of the incarnation—‘he gave [us] authority to become children of God’.”⁶⁸

One further reflection on the Fourth Gospel in relation to birthing imagery is in order. Apart from science-fiction programs where a child can be conceived and born in a single episode, the cycle of birth for a human generally requires 40 weeks. At a point in time, the woman typically becomes aware that she has conceived, and her waiting time begins. The actual moment for birth arrives months later and the moment for parenting begins. One *might* consider

64 M. E. Boismard, *St. John’s Prologue*, trans. Carisbrooke Dominicans (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1957), 133.

65 A. Köstenberger, *Theology*, 259. Emphasis by the original author.

66 Vellanickal, *Divine Sonship*, 359.

67 Culpepper, “Pivot,” 31.

68 Culpepper, “Pivot,” 31. Emphasis by the original author.

the Fourth Gospel to reflect this gestation cycle. Everything preceding John 20 serves as preparation for this new life yet to come.⁶⁹ A safe and successful birth requires attention during the time of the pregnancy. Much is to be learned prior to bringing a new life into the family. A heightened sense of expectancy, a time of living in the not yet moment, fills the air.

During the writing of this essay, it has been my privilege to be on a similar journey of expectancy. I was told I could anticipate the birth of a first grandchild. Excitement builds month by month. Precautions must be taken to insure a safe pregnancy. Yet, the time of living in the not yet is ever present for now. Some of what others tell me to expect still seems a bit surreal; I do not fully understand everything communicated. The bulk of the Fourth Gospel represents this same scenario. Many pieces do not fit comfortably together, yet one day they will. In the words of the anonymous writer:

Beloved, we are now children of God, yet who we will be has not yet been made clear. We know that when Christ appears we will look like him because we will see him as he truly is. Everyone who holds tightly to this hope for the appearance of Christ is being purified because Christ is purity personified.

1 JOHN 3:2–3, my translation

69 Note John 16:20–24. A reading of John's Gospel that emphasizes these themes might provide insight into the discussion in John 20:31a regarding the timing of the verb tense for πιστεύω. While 1 John 5 shares a similar emphasis on belief, Jesus as the Christ, and life/eternal life, its perspective with respect to the timing involved differs from the Gospel.

Fictive Kinship and Its Symbolism in the Literary Structures of 1 John

Dorothy A. Lee

Introduction

The groundbreaking work of R. Alan Culpepper in his *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* alerted readers to the qualities of the Fourth Gospel as literature and laid the ground-work for subsequent Johannine literary study.¹ It began a new narrative appreciation of the Gospel that had far-reaching consequences, not only for an understanding of John, but also for narrative study of the New Testament more widely.² The identification of core symbols and their role in the plot of John's Gospel was particularly useful in relation to a deeper and more authentic appreciation of the literary characteristics of New Testament narrative.³

In a text such as the Fourth Gospel, symbols belong in a narrative context where they develop meaning as the story progresses.⁴ In an epistolary context, the rhetorical genre takes the form of layering through the persuasive argument of the letter. Yet rhetorical study of the Epistles also benefits from an

1 R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel. A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); see also Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Anatomies of Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (Atlanta: SBL, 2008).

2 See Tom Thatcher, "Anatomies of the Fourth Gospel: Past, Present, and Future Probes," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism*, 1–35; also Christopher W. Skinner, "Characterization," in *How John Works: Storytelling in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Douglas Estes and Ruth Sheridan (Atlanta: SBL, 2016), 118–19, noting that virtually all the essays in this collection make reference to *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*.

3 Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 180–202.

4 See, e.g., Dorothy A. Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The Interplay of Form and Meaning* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), and "Imagery" in *How John Works*, 151–69; Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); and Ruben Zimmermann, "Imagery in John: Opening up Paths into the Tangled Thicket of John's Figurative World," in *Imagery in the Gospel of John: Terms, Forms, Themes, and Theology of Johannine Figurative Language*, ed. Jörg Frey, Ruben Zimmermann, and Jan G. van der Watt, WUNT 200 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 1–43.

understanding of literary technique. There can be a kind of “implied narrative” within the structures of an epistle, including the use of metaphor and symbol but also a number of other elements as outlined by Culpepper in formal narrative (e.g., point of view, irony, characterization, implied author and reader).⁵ In a similar way, the narrative of a Gospel has elements of rhetorical structures and argument. Just as narrative can depend on core symbolism to direct and shape it, so epistolary rhetoric can have a similar function. Indeed, the distinction between the two genres of narrative and epistle should not be pressed, since they overlap. This essay focuses particularly on the symbolism of fictive kinship in the “implied narrative” and literary structures of 1 John, where it plays a key role.⁶

Kinship is a particularly illuminating symbol because of its frequency in the New Testament and also because it has its origins in pervasive Old Testament language and imagery. According to Scott Hahn, covenant and kinship are closely interwoven in the biblical world, covenant often expressed in familial imagery that emphasizes the kinship relationship between God and God’s people, where God “enters into kinship bonds by covenant oath.”⁷ This covenant-kinship involves mutuality, commitment, respect, and amity. The same imagery carries over into kinship models within the New Testament writings, including 1 John.

In socio-cultural terms, biblical kinship symbolism is dependent on a distinctive understanding of family. In the ancient world, kinship involved a wider conception of family than the nuclear groupings of the West; social structuring was communal rather than individual. In Jewish as well as Greco-Roman contexts, family was based on consanguinity, blood relationship to an originating figure, through which the bloodline was traced via the males of the family.⁸ In this sense, it was both patriarchal and patrilineal: the eldest father/grandfather having significant power over all the adults in the household, including other adult males. The role of the *paterfamilias* in Roman society, for example, included the power of life and death over other family members and

5 Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 13–49, 149–227.

6 In other “catholic” epistles, God is, by definition, “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:3); 2 John uses the same fictive symbolism, while 3 John does not, using “beloved” to refer to the recipient, and “my children” only once (3 John 4). For a study of the ecclesiology of Hebrews in light of kinship imagery, see esp. Amy L. B. Peeler, *You are my Son: The Family of God in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

7 Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 48.

8 See Joseph H. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 27–58.

the household slaves.⁹ The mother of the family, *materfamilias*, gained power and prestige largely through bearing sons who ensured her blood connection to the family into which she had married.

Marriage, moreover, while it could involve the companionable intimacy of husband and wife, had as its primary purpose the well-being of the larger family group and its possessions, as well as the provision of progeny. It was primarily contractual rather than romantic. This was more the case in the Roman context than the Jewish, since the latter was able to confirm amorous relations, even if not the only component in a marriage. One's closest relationships, therefore, were with siblings, and indeed the main form of cross-gender intimacy was within the family, particularly between brother and sister,¹⁰ but also between parent and child.

The New Testament makes a number of socio-cultural assumptions in its use of kinship language to give directions about family life,¹¹ but also in its frequent employment of fictive kinship symbolism to define identity in the early Christian community.¹² In reading these ancient texts, the original context needs to be taken into account without importing contemporary notions of family and kinship. The biological family remains within the background of the text for the ancient reader and is not sidelined or eliminated by the symbolic transference. For metaphors to work, both tenor and vehicle need to be present in order to enable the reader to have the "stereoscopic vision" needed to grasp the metaphorical meaning.¹³ The tenor is the community in its inter-relationships, while the vehicle is the biological family. Literal kinship, in other words, is the basis of fictive kinship for the metaphors of the text of 1 John to operate effectively.

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- 9 On the hierarchical nature of the Roman family, see Eva Marie Lassen, "The Roman Family: Ideal and Metaphor," in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor*, ed. Halvor Moxnes (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), 103–20.
 - 10 Hellerman, *Ancient Church*, 35–43. Sophocles' *Antigone* is an excellent example of the high status accorded to sibling intimacy (Hugh Lloyd-Jones, ed., *Sophocles, Antigone* [Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 2014]).
 - 11 Further on this, see Stephen C. Barton, *Life Together: Family, Sexuality and Community in the New Testament and Today* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), esp. 17–36.
 - 12 On fictive kinship in Paul, see, e.g., Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Mary Katherine Birge, *The Language of Belonging: A Rhetorical Analysis of Kinship Language in First Corinthians* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002); and Trevor J. Burke, *Family Matters: A Socio-Historical Study of Kinship Metaphors in 1 Thessalonians* (London: T&T Clark, 2003).
 - 13 Dorothy, A. Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbol, Gender, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 16–20.

1 Core Symbolism in 1 John

The core symbolism of 1 John is essentially that of fictive kinship: covenant kinship that is based not on blood or marital ties but rather on a symbolic sense of mutuality and communion. In this model, believers are understood to be part of the *familia Dei*,¹⁴ a concept that is appropriated metaphorically and given, in effect, theological priority over the natural family.¹⁵ The kinship symbolism manifests itself throughout the Epistle in three dimensions, underlying and supporting its key themes.¹⁶ In the first place, and most significantly, the symbolism is apparent in the core imagery of Father-Son that delineates the relationship between God and Jesus. Secondly, family symbolism is the primary designation of believers in the Christian community. Thirdly, family symbolism defines the relationship between the writer and the community, based on the divine family. These three dimensions interact throughout the Epistle.

Narrative traces are involved across each dimension. The “substructure” of the Epistle is the story of the incarnation and atonement, which underlies the text and its discourse.¹⁷ But within 1 John there are also narrative allusions to events within the ongoing experience of the community. In one sense, the Epistle “narrates” the drama of the family of God, drawing on the narrative “substructure” and the ongoing chronicle of the community (see figure 22.1). These narrative elements act as “interpenetrating circles” in which one narrative world is embedded within another.¹⁸

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- 14 See in particular D. G. van der Merwe, “Family Metaphorics: A Rhetorical Tool in the Epistle of 1 John,” *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 20 (2009): 89–108; and “Domestic Architecture: Culture, Fictive Kinship and Identity in the First Epistle of John,” *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 21 (2010): 207–26.
 - 15 The same is true for the Fourth Gospel. The key text on kinship here is Jan G. van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in Gospel according to John* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), esp. 161–393; see also Adesola Joan Akala, *The Son-Father Relationship and Christological Symbolism in the Gospel of John* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), esp. 127–213.
 - 16 Gail R. O’Day, “1, 2, and 3 John,” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, 3rd ed., ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 623.
 - 17 The term “narrative substructure” is coined by Richard B. Hays in relation to elements in Galatians; see *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), esp. 21–117.
 - 18 Norman R. Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul: Philemon and the Sociology of Paul’s Narrative World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 17.

Narrative in substructure	Narrative in text
• incarnation 1:1–2 • expiatory blood of Christ 1:7–8, 2:1–2 • Christ laying down his life on cross 3:16 • Jesus come in the flesh 4:2–3 • God sent the Son 4:9–10 • God's love as prior (in the Christ event) 4:19 • Jesus' coming by water and blood 5:6–8^a	PAST: what has been experienced & proclaimed 1:3–5 PRESENT/FUTURE: eliminating sin 2:1–6 PAST: achievements of community 2:12–14 PAST: dissidents leaving community 2:18–27 FUTURE: Jesus' return; seeing Jesus 2:28–3:3 PAST: message of love & story of Cain 3:11–15 PAST: coming to know God 4:16 PAST/PRESENT: gift of eternal life 5:11

- a Most scholars take the reference to water and blood to refer to Jesus' baptism and his death (e.g. Werner Vogler, *Die Briefe des Johannes* [Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1993], 162–64); others see it as a reference only to his death (George L. Parsenios, *First, Second, and Third John* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014], 122); an allusion to his birth (incarnation), however, cannot be ruled out (cf. John 19:34; cf. also John 3:5; 7:38).

FIGURE 22.1 *Narrative elements in substructure and text.*

Thus, for example, the Epistle contains allusions to trauma within the community in references to separation and division. These play a significant role within the “drama” of the Epistle itself and are not simply part of its background. The theological division poses a threat to the community (2:7), a threat that can only be overcome if it holds to its core kinship identity. In characteristic dualism, the Christ of the kinship community stands over against the Antichrist/antichrists of the dissidents (2:18–19); those who deny the Son

against those who confess him (2:22–23); those who are from God against those who are from the world (4:1–6); and those who know truth against those who have embraced error (4:6). For the writer, the kinship symbolism thus plays a key rhetorical role in a community whose trauma reverberates across the text, strengthening identity in the face of uncertainty.¹⁹

Further evidence of trauma is found in relation to the persistence of sin within the community (ἁμαρτία, ἁμαρτάνω). The formal contradiction between sinning and not sinning is the sign of this painful crack in the community's life, giving glimpses of a narrative both within and behind the text. The brothers and sisters cannot sin by definition, yet it is clear that they do, since they are enjoined to confess their sins (1:7–2:1). For this writer, sin belongs outside the community which lives now in the family of God, in the fullness of God's love and light, keeping the commandments and abiding in God; yet sin remains like an open wound in its story, a painful and contradictory reality.²⁰ The existence of hatred within the community is a sign of death, not life (3:14). The imagery of fictive kinship serves the pastoral function of moving the story of the community from internal destructive elements into the eschatological fullness of the life of God, and into a deeper apprehension of the Christ story (2:2; 4:10).

The structure of the Epistle is notoriously difficult, being spiral rather than linear.²¹ The key themes are reverted to again and again, each time the repetition more fulsome and clarifying, circling round and around in affective ways more intuitive in their movement than logical.²² Keeping in mind this caveat, the following discussion sees a loose division of 1 John into three sections between the prologue (1:1–4) and the epilogue (5:13–21). These divisions derive more or less from Culpepper's commentary,²³ though with differing headings that reflect the core kinship imagery:

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- 19 The wider context in which the family theme is promoted in 1 John may also reflect separation from the biological family, with the result that "[t]hese familial bonds replace the bonds that have been severed" (Parsenios, *First, Second, and Third John*, 78–79).
 - 20 D. van der Merwe, "Understanding "sin" in the Johannine Epistles," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 26 (2005): 551–56.
 - 21 Ruth B. Edwards, *The Johannine Epistles* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 36–37.
 - 22 For a brief survey of the multiple structural theories on 1 John, see, e.g., I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 22–27; and Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 116–29, 764–65.
 - 23 R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 253–54. For a chiasmic structuring of 1 John, see J. P. Heil, 1–3 *John: Worship by Loving God and One Another to Live Eternally* (Eugene: Cascade, 2015), 6–25.

Prologue (1:1–4)	introduction
Part 1 (1:5–2:27)	κοινωνία as kinship
Part 2 (2:28–4:6)	children of God
Part 3 (4:7–5:12)	love in family of God
Epilogue (5:13–21)	conclusion

This suggested division need not represent a fixed structure for the Epistle, since such a neat demarcation is difficult, if not impossible.²⁴ The purpose, rather, is to trace the development of the family symbolism (figure 22.2).

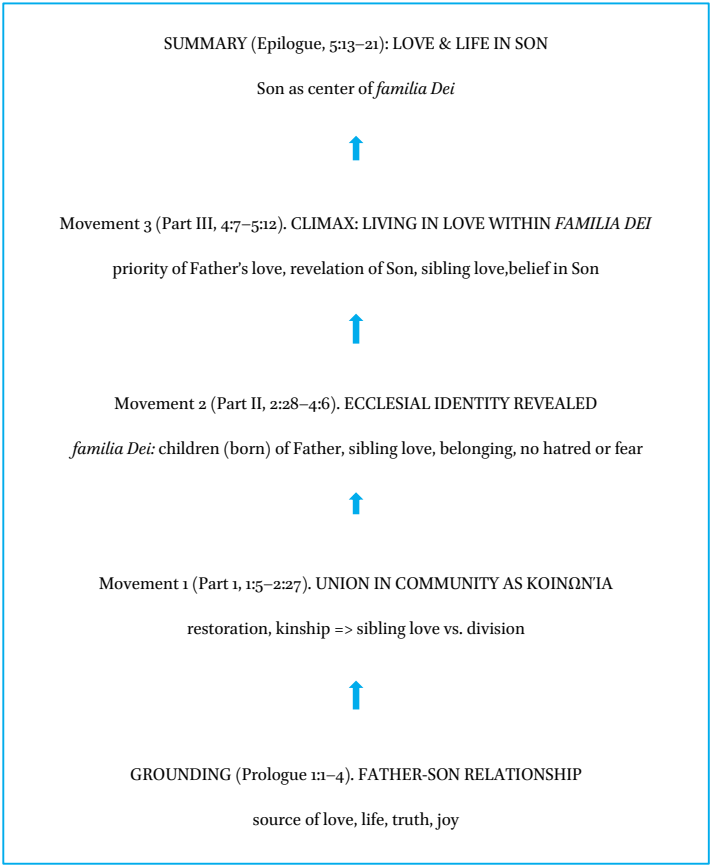


FIGURE 22.2 *Flow chart of symbolic kinship and its “narrative movement” in 1 John.*

24 D. Moody Smith sees a link between the complex structure of 1 John and the structure of the Fourth Gospel (*First, Second, and Third John* [Louisville: John Knox, 1991], 21–24). Further on this, see Malcolm Coombes, *1 John: The Epistle as a Relecture of the Gospel of John* (Preston: Mosaic, 2–13), esp. 186–99.

2 Grounding: Prologue (1:1–4)

The prologue of 1 John introduces the basic kinship imagery (1:1–4). The union of the Father and the Son (1:3) is the basic symbol of the Epistle and is introduced in the long, complicated opening sentence that serves as the basis of, and justification for, the fictive family through the text.²⁵ At the same time, family imagery for the community does not yet appear; only the grounding of the community, including the author, in the relationship between Father and Son. This relationship is archetypal for the whole epistle and all its connections and affiliations: “[t]he one kind of fellowship demands and constitutes the other.”²⁶

1 John begins with κοινωνία as the way in which the community interacts, both vertically and horizontally.²⁷ For this author, that communion has already embraced believers through the incarnation and word of the gospel, God having spoken face-to-face and flesh-to-flesh.²⁸ On this note the Epistle begins, emphasizing above all the tangible and sensory nature of the message received: with God initiating the relationship in the divine story revealed in Christ, extending the divine intimacy, and forging a life-giving bridge across an otherwise impassable abyss (“No one has ever seen God,” John 1:18; 5:37; 6:46²⁹). The message of the incarnate one is the means by which this relationality is shared, thus accounting for its priority in the opening wording, with its numinous and mysterious origins ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς: “what we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, what we have gazed upon, and our hands have handled” (1:1–2).

At the same time, the purpose of this divine revelation—the revelation of the *familia Dei* and the life it engenders—is introduced in the prologue through the testimony of those who first proclaimed it in the community’s

25 See van der Merwe, “Domestic Architecture,” 211–12. Martin M. Culy sees the flow of 1:1–3a as carefully constructed and oblique, paralleling the opening of the Fourth Gospel where Jesus is not named until 1:17 (*I, II, III John: A Handbook of the Greek Text* [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2004], 1–8).

26 Van der Merwe, “Family Metaphorics,” 97.

27 Further on κοινωνία in 1 John, see van der Merwe, “Family Metaphorics,” 97–99; and Georg Strecker, *The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 20.

28 For the view that this is a general reference to the message as well as the person of Jesus, see, e.g., Marianne Meye Thompson, *1–3 John* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), 36–37; also Culpepper, *Gospel and Letters*, 254–56.

29 Van der Merwe, “Domestic Architecture,” 217–18.

story (“we”).³⁰ The κοινωνία into which believers are drawn creates a sense of unity between testifiers and testified, between preacher and people, in the one pre-existing communion within God (1:3). The rich term κοινωνία is not again employed in the Epistle outside the first chapter. The purpose of writing the letter is to fulfill the κοινωνία and joy between writer and community:³¹ the first person plural verb, γράφομεν at 1:4, underlines that for the Johannine community “membership ... is intrinsically corporate and not individual,” evoking “a sense of solidarity.”³² Yet the origins of communion are divine, rather than something human beings can conjure; only by entering into the narrative of the divine κοινωνία can believers share communion with one another.

3 Κοινωνία & Kinship (1:5–2:27)

In the following verses, the text makes clear that, though κοινωνία can be damaged by sin, yet forgiveness and reconciliation—that is, the restoration of communion—is made possible (1:8–2:2). Once again, the initiative lies on the divine side. 1 John defines κοινωνία as standing essentially in opposition to sin and its darkness (2:6–7).³³ Yet even here, the light of God shines on human darkness, because Christ removes sin and stands before the Father as παράκλητος (2:1b). Thus both incarnation and atonement are of equal relevance for the wellbeing of the community: only Christ makes possible κοινωνία in the restored relationship between believers and God. In this sense, 1 John demonstrates an ideal conception of κοινωνία coupled with a realistic, pastoral assessment of

30 On the different ways 1 John uses “we” (creating a community against opponents, a form of “I,” and the “we” of the Johannine school), see H.-J. Klauck, *Der erst Johannesbrief* (Braunschweig: Benziger, 1991), Excurs 1, 73–77.

31 There is some dispute as to whether 1 John is really a letter, given its lack of epistolary beginning and ending, or a tract or treatise of some kind (see Edwards, *Johannine Epistles*, 34–35). Yet, in favour of a letter, “there is a tone of endearment and closeness characteristic of letters” in the text (Margaret A. Motion, “1 John,” in *The IVP Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans [Downers Grove: IVP, 2002], 798).

32 Judith M. Lieu, *I, II, & III John: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 41.

33 Pheme Perkins argues that 1 John 1:6 suggests the dissidents are also claiming to have κοινωνία (“*Koinonia* in 1 John 1:3–7: The Social Context of Division in the Johannine Letters,” *CBQ* 45 [1983]: 636–37).

how often members of the community fail.³⁴ For this reason, the willingness to acknowledge those things which damage κοινωνία is essential in order to repair it.³⁵

Within the opening of 1 John, therefore, κοινωνία refers to that intimacy of divine relationship into which believers have been invited, communion within community, communion within the being of God. Thereafter, the term itself is not found in 1 John, though it has helped to establish the relational framework of the Epistle. It is replaced—or rather expanded and clarified—by the kinship symbolism, which gradually unfolds through the movement of the Epistle.³⁶

The imagery has implications for the author's relationship to the audience, which is part of its "implied narrative." The language of κοινωνία between the two is already established, but it begins to move forward in kinship symbolism for those in the community. Within the discussion on sin, the author first addresses the community as τέκνία, a diminutive of τέκνον with caritative intent: "dear children" (2:1).³⁷ The mutual κοινωνία established between writer and audience creates its own sense of intimacy. The writer projects a self-characterization, a leadership that implies both seniority and intimacy,³⁸ being depicted as a mother/father-figure to the community within the world of the text.³⁹ Family love is based on affection and mutuality, and the relationship between leader and people, writer and audience, belongs within the same sphere. Note that 2:5 is the first explicit reference to love (ἀγάπη) in the Epistle, as a way of defining and filling out the meaning of κοινωνία. Outside of the divine sphere, the full kinship imagery has not yet emerged.

For the first time, the readers are referred to as "beloved" at 2:7 (ἀγαπητοί), articulating a κοινωνία already established. Twice in the following verses the writer addresses the audience as "dear children" and "children" (τέκνία, παιδιά,

34 "This at first sight impossible combination of elements is somehow reconciled—and Jesus is at the heart of the reconciliation" (J. L. Houlden, *The Johannine Epistles*, 2nd ed. [London: A&C Black, 1994], 61).

35 Robert W. Yarbrough, 1–3 *John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 52–56.

36 On the close connection between κοινωνία and kinship, see van der Merwe, "Family Metaphors," 97–99.

37 The translation "dear friends" in some English versions (e.g., NJB) erases the kinship imagery for a supposed "dynamic equivalent."

38 According to Rudolf Bultmann, the writer is portrayed here as "authoritative representative of the tradition" (*The Johannine Epistles: A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973], 83).

39 For a similar concept in regard to Paul's leadership, see Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Our Mother St. Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 17–50.

2:12, 14), defining—as before—the mutuality of their relationship and the family imagery. Significantly, that intimacy of address accompanies the first introduction of the sibling language for the community (2:9–29),⁴⁰ along with instructions on the necessity of love among the brothers and sisters if they are to live in light and not darkness: “the one hating their brother or sister ... the one loving their brother or sister ...” (2:9–10).⁴¹ The explicit purpose of the Epistle, expressed in these verses, is to strengthen the affective bonds within the community. The sibling language further defines and locates κοινωνία within the context of fictive kinship. As sisters and brothers share the closest cross-gender bonds within ancient society, the symbolism is particularly apt for the writer’s declared purpose. The warmth of the language undercuts authoritarian undertones and sets the whole in the context of love and trust among siblings. Most significantly, it is grounded in the primary kinship imagery of Father and Son.

The stated purpose of the Epistle (γράφω, ἔγραψα, 2:7–14) also picks up the symbolism of light and darkness, which articulates both truth and righteousness, signifying love of the ἀδελφός, the brother or sister (2:9–11). In the biblical world, light itself is a core symbol of life (cf. Gen 1:3; Ps 27:1; John 1:4–5), and life is always lived in covenant kinship, in mutuality and love. By contrast, sin is a force for division, expressed in contentious hatred within the covenant family and embodying the essence of darkness. Hatred is a form of blindness that shuts out the light, leading to severance and disconnection, whereas love illuminates and gives life, uniting in the deepest bonds of kinship. For 1 John, therefore, the love of the other within the family of faith is the most deeply truthful and law-abiding way of regarding them. The core value here is love, because it is dependent on the symbolism of family where righteousness and truth find their meaning. Obedience to the commandments can thus never be divorced from relational love. The kinship symbolism communicates a sublime story of enduring love, connection, and belonging, as well as tracing the outlines of a tragic story of kinship alienation and conflict.

40 Van der Merwe. “Domestic Architecture,” 212–13.

41 On the appropriateness of an inclusive translation of ἀδελφοί, see Gerard S. Sloyan, *Walking in the Truth: Perseverers and Deserters: The First, Second, and Third Letters of John* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1995), 20. Against this, see the ESV translation, which claims to be more literal yet presents a text that, far more than the original, renders invisible the female members of the community. See Marmy A. Clason, “Feminism, Generic ‘He,’ and the TVIC Bible Translation Debate,” *Critical Discourse Studies* 3 (2006): 23–35. Klauck notes that the women of the community are included in the androcentric language by ancient literary convention, which is nonetheless problematical for us today (*Der erst Johannesbrief*, Excurs 3, “Die Liebe zu den Brüdern und Schwestern,” 277).

Within these verses, 1 John shows its preference for kinship language. The repeated use of πατέρες (2:13–14)—to be understood in an inclusive way (“fathers and mothers”)—most likely refers metaphorically to older people within the community,⁴² just as young people are likewise addressed, both male and female. This division of members of the community, familiar from the Household Codes and elsewhere in the New Testament Epistles (e.g., 1 Tim 5:1–2; Titus 2:2–8; 1 Pet 5:5), is made “in order to reinforce its coherence” and need not imply distinctive roles of institutional authority.⁴³ The employment of familial language, however, reinforces the kinship symbolism, which now extends to the community: in this case, using the term “fathers and mothers” in place of the more usual “elders.”

The pastoral and theological purpose of writing, which is to strengthen the identity of the fictive family, continues in the following verses, but this time it is set within an explicitly eschatological perspective (2:15–27). According to D. van der Merwe, within the kinship covenant, “[f]uture eschatology is ... a culmination of the present fellowship in the *familia Dei*,” so that eschatology becomes “a situation which is constantly realizing itself.”⁴⁴ Belonging to the eschatological family of God looks forward to the fulfillment-story of Christ’s future coming.⁴⁵

When 1 John instructs against loving the world (ἀγαπάω, 2:15–17), this command describes precisely the wrong kind of love, the love of what is fleeting and evanescent, as opposed to love of the sibling which is eternal. This eschatological dimension begins, once more, with the address παῖδιά, which, at the same time, unveils the chief theological problem: the limitations of the love command in the chronicle of the community. It would seem that love is to be directed to insiders and not necessarily to those who have left. The issue is a theological one: “[t]he Christological arguments in 1 John are concentrated essentially in the assertion that Jesus Christ really did come in the flesh.”⁴⁶ It is also literary, since those who have left are given specific characterization as dissidents and unbelievers. For the implied author, those who have left the

42 Thompson, 1–3 *John*, 62–66, sees this as a general reference to old-age groups, with spiritual maturity also in mind.

43 Lieu, I, II, & III *John*, 86–87.

44 D. van der Merwe, “Eschatology in the First Epistle of John: κοινωνία in the *familia Dei*,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 27 (2006): 1067–68.

45 Van der Merwe, “Eschatology,” 1073.

46 Hans Weder, “*Deus Incarnatus*: On the Hermeneutics of Christology in the Johannine Writings,” in *Exploring the Gospel of John; In Honor of D. Moody Smith*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 341. See also Strecker, *Johannine Letters*, 69–76.

community have, in effect, denied “the Father and the Son” (2:22), which is a pre-condition for belonging. It is precisely this theological disagreement, which, being foundational to 1 John, places the dissidents outside the bounds of communion.⁴⁷ The issue, for the writer, comes down to their defection from the divine κοινωνία and thus from the family of faith that is constituted within and by that godly fellowship (2:27). In this sense, in the world of the text they do not belong among those addressed by the Epistle.⁴⁸

The unusual imagery of “anointing” (χρῖσμα) is significant within this context, anointing being a gratuitous gift and a personified, pedagogical aid. If it refers back to initial entry into the community by the Spirit through baptism, as is likely,⁴⁹ it holds a vital connection to Jesus himself, the Anointed One/Messiah (Χριστός), and it concerns fundamentally the question of identity. The Spirit in 1 John plays a significant role in relation to the fictive family and “applies to God’s children the redemptive work of the Father and the Son,” becoming “the guiding influence” in their lives.⁵⁰ Anointing in the Spirit thus bestows on believers their true identity as children of God, creating an intersection between Christ’s story and their story. They are embraced, through the Spirit, within the filiation of Christ and belong therefore in the family of God.⁵¹

4 Identity as Children of God (2:28–4:6)

The epistle now moves into its core ecclesial language for the community. The image of birth, first introduced at 2:29 (γενένηται), leads into a more

47 This “raises the difficult issue of the proper limits of toleration and diversity” (Culpepper, *Gospel and Letters*, 255). While there is no explicit command to love outside the community, 1 John proclaims the universal promise of an expiation that extends beyond the kinship community: “not for ours only but also for the whole world” (2:2); see Toan Do, “Does περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου imply “the sins of the whole world” in 1 John 2,2?” *Biblica* 94 (2013): 415–35.

48 As John Painter points out, the Epistle is pastoral more than polemical, and thus not addressed to the dissidents (1, 2, and 3 *John*, SP [Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002, 2008], 115–16).

49 See, e.g., Brown, *Epistles of John*, 341–48; Parnenios, *First, Second, and Third John*, 86–90; and Painter, 1, 2, and 3 *John*, 197–99.

50 Van der Merwe, “Family Metaphorics,” 95.

51 Van der Merwe stresses the theme of *imitatio* in the Epistle (e.g., 1:6) but the imitation of Christ flows from entry into a new status in solidarity with the Son (“Family Metaphorics,” 98–100).

extended discussion on love within the sibling relationship as sign of kinship identity.⁵² The focus is on the gift of love as divinely initiated and given (3:1), forming the story of the church as the bringing-into-communion of those born of God,⁵³ i.e., the children of God (cf. John 1:12–13; 3:1–8).⁵⁴ Thus the term “children of God” designates the Christian community in 1 John, just as the Fourth Gospel’s images of sheepfold, vine, and fishing net symbolize the church (John 10:1–18; 15:1–17; 21:1–14).⁵⁵

The notion of birth can be interpreted as masculine or feminine, and it is likely that both elements are present metaphorically in 1 John, referring both to God’s begetting (σπέρμα, 3:9) and to God’s giving birth.⁵⁶ The imagery forms an essential part of the kinship symbolism. Assuming that the reference is to Jesus and seeing God in Jesus, the idea of eschatological likeness to him (3:2) most likely refers to his status as Son, and thus to believers becoming more fully and completely sons and daughters of God (living without sin, living in the light, living out of the righteousness of love, 3:2). Believers do not receive everything at birth, any more than a child born into a natural family does, but they learn and grow. Just as the sight (and touch and hearing) of Christ gives birth to believers in relationship with God, so in the fullness of the divine narrative the sight of the Son in full, eschatological glory, will fulfill the faith story of the fledgling community: to become the mature children of God (3:2).⁵⁷

52 Judith Lieu, *The Theology of the Johannine Epistles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 33–38.

53 According to Jan van der Watt, being born into the family of God in the Johannine literature signifies salvation (*An Introduction to the Johannine Gospel and Letters* [London: T&T Clark, 2007], 51–65).

54 See van der Merwe, “Family Metaphors,” 94.

55 On the ecclesiology of the Fourth Gospel in relation to the core family imagery, see van der Watt, *Family of the King*, 438–439. For a survey of different theories on the relationship between the Gospel of John and 1 John, see esp. R. Alan Culpepper, “The Relationship between the Gospel and 1 John,” in *Communities in Dispute: Current Scholarship on the Johannine Epistles*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and Paul N. Anderson, ECL 13 (Atlanta: SBL, 2014), 95–119.

56 On maternal imagery in the Gospel of John, see Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 135–65. Against this view, cf. Birger Olsson, *A Commentary on the Letters of John: An Intra-Jewish Approach*, trans. Richard J. Erickson (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013), 317–22.

57 Further on this verse, see D. van der Merwe, “Early Christian Spirituality of ‘seeing the divine’ in 1 John,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 71 (2015): 1–11.

Being born anew in love is the dramatic event that enables believers to begin the movement from the realm of sin to that of righteousness (3:4–10), and their ethical behavior reveals their true identity as children of God (as against children of the devil); thus ethics and kinship are closely allied.⁵⁸ The essence of true faith lived out in deed, and not just in word, is authenticated in love of the brother or sister, a love that will go the extent of giving up one's life: the very opposite of the story of Cain, who took his brother's life (3:11–24). The exhortation to love in this section is prefixed by *τεκνία*, reinforcing the symbolic analogy with Cain and his biological family to whom he shows not love but a murderous hatred. It is the opposite of authentic family love where "[a] true and loving child remains completely focused on acting according to his identity."⁵⁹

The discussion on the testing of spirits is also pertinent to the kinship symbolism (3:19–4:6). It reinforces the point that fictive kinship is grounded not only in love but also in belief: it has, in other words, a cognitive as well as affective dimension. Loving sentiment is not enough for this writer. The community is to be held together by its beliefs as much as by its affectionate relations, and particularly its belief in the narrative of the incarnation, as the sensory language of the Epistle implies: seeing, hearing, touching, flesh and blood (1:1–3; 4:2; 5:6–8). The bounds of shared blood in the biological family, leading to love within the kinship group, are replaced in the fictive family by shared conviction around central doctrinal themes. Love is therefore not the sole adhesive element of the community. The pattern of kinship is held together, not by biology or blood, but by love and faith in Jesus the Messiah/Christ (2:22) and the incarnate Son (4:2).⁶⁰ Claims to veracity bind the siblings together in a common apprehension of truth: "[c]onfession of Christ provides another boundary of the realm of light."⁶¹ Metaphorically speaking, the children of God/the Father are also the author's children ("beloved," "little children"), since all are knit together in the one garment of love, truth, knowledge, and faith.

58 See Jan van der Watt, "Ethics in First John: A Literary and Socioscientific Perspective," *CBQ* 61 (1999): 491–511; and "On Ethics in 1 John," in *Communities in Dispute*, 197–222.

59 Van der Watt, "Ethics," 497.

60 The discernment of spirits refers most likely to the dissidents (so Pierre Bonnard, *Les épîtres johanniques* [Genève: Labor et Fides, 1983], 83–89, who emphasizes the close link between Christology and pneumatology in 1 John).

61 Thompson, 1–3 *John*, 60.

5 Love within the Family of God (4:7–5:12)

The Epistle reaches its dramatic climax in the most explicit treatment of love as the center of the community's life—divine and human—which lies at the heart of the kinship symbolism. This love has its source and origin in God's nature and prevenient love, a love made visible in the union of the community, where all are born as children of God and therefore must by definition love each other as siblings. A new identity is bestowed, an identity that counters exclusive claims of biological identity. Such kinship love within the family is the sign of belonging and therefore non-negotiable. The love gathers around a common witness to Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the children's identity dependent on that of the Son and his unique status in relationship to God (5:5).

At the same time, the strong fictive kinship bonds, based on the God who is love (4:8), imply not only hatred as the opposite of love but also—perhaps surprisingly—fear (φόβος, 4:18), which stands opposed to the assurance called forth by love; it is also part of the Johannine community's dualistic outlook.⁶² Within the family, believers can live and act with openness and boldness (παρρησία, 4:17) because of their abiding-in-love with Christ and with the sisters and brothers in the community. This kinship creates love and relationship—and gives identity and confidence (4:20–21).

In this context, 1 John speaks of love being “perfected” or “perfect,” as the language is often translated (τελειόω, 2:5; 4:12, 17; and τελείος, 4:18), although “completed” is probably a better translation. The culmination of love is to be achieved within the kinship community, wherein both hatred and fear are eliminated among the brothers and sisters in their common communion, amity, and joy. The imagery points, not to a disembodied state of flawlessness but rather to a divine intentionality within the kinship symbolism, a sense of completion and goal that has its origins in the divine narrative: “To say that God's love has been brought to its completion in believers' love for one another is to say that in this mutual love the intended aim of God's love has been achieved.”⁶³ This is set within the dualistic contrast between truth and falsehood, life and death (5:6–12).⁶⁴

62 Van der Merwe, “Eschatology,” 1065.

63 David Rensberger, “Completed Love: 1 John 4:11–18 and the Mission of the New Testament Church,” in *Communities in Dispute*, 237–71.

64 The language of v. 13 in particular echoes that of John 20:30–31; see David Rensberger, who argues for a close relationship between the Gospel and Epistle, *The Epistles of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 94.

6 Epilogue (5:13–21)

Once again, the purpose of the Epistle is reiterated in “I write” language (γράφω, 5:13), emphasizing the story dimension in the relationship between writer and audience. The intention is to enable a deeper level of knowledge in those who belong to the family of God. This core belief revolves around the identity of Jesus as Son, which provides both the cognitive content of revelation, and by implication, its confirmation in love. Life and confidence are the consequences for the fictive family which embraces this identity. It leads also to an openness of relationship, where prayers are answered because listening and responding to the related other is foundational within the ideal family (5:14–15).

The core kinship symbolism does not vanish in the last section of the Epistle, which retraces earlier themes: believing, bearing witness to truth, eternal life. Those who belong in the community of life, born of God, love one another and participate in an ongoing narration wherein they protect their own kin, even in remedial situations of sin; they are in turn loved and protected by God.⁶⁵ The writer outlines a future in which believers act as concerned and faithful siblings to one another, keeping themselves from ongoing sin and protecting those sisters and brothers who lose their way.⁶⁶ The last sentence, seemingly disconnected from the rest of the Epistle, summarizes the love command, based on the kinship between God and believers (figure 22.3), and parallels the relationship between God and Israel where idolatry is the sign of covenant and kinship faithlessness. Significantly, it is prefixed by *τεχνία*.⁶⁷ To keep from idols (*ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων*) is to abide (*μένω*) within the new kinship family of love, life, witness, and truth (5:21).

65 Van der Watt, *An Introduction to the Johannine Gospel and Letters*, 64–65.

66 The sin that leads to death (5:16b) may well relate to the dissidents and their denial of the community’s Christology, along with the consequential severing of the bonds of love; see Parsenios, *First, Second, and Third John*, 124–25.

67 Terry Griffith argues that the reference to idols is integral to the Epistle and its meaning within the context of Hellenistic Judaism; see *Keep Yourself from Idols: A New Look at 1 John* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), esp. 58–81.

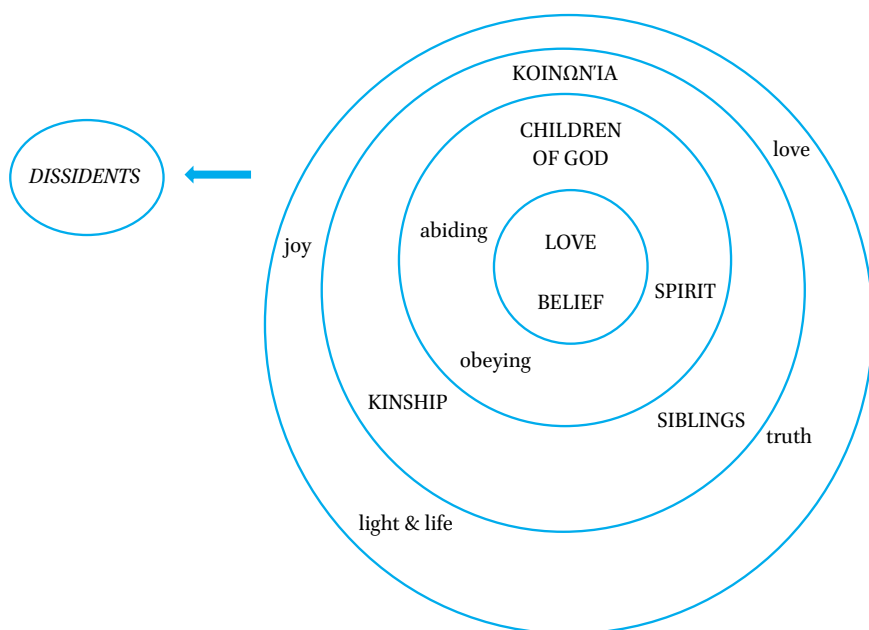


FIGURE 22.3 *Metaphorical field of familia Dei in 1 John.*

Conclusion

As elsewhere in the biblical world, 1 John makes explicit use of fictive kinship symbolism to explore in a pastoral context its understanding of Christology and ecclesiology within the community's story. The imagery and metaphors begin in the divine realm with Jesus' identity as Son and his unique and intimate *κοινωνία* with the Father, a communion that is shared with believers who becomes siblings to one another. The core fictive kinship symbolism wends its way through the rhetoric of 1 John, shaping its dependent metaphors and supporting its major argument within the "implied narrative."

This metaphorical field raises the hermeneutical issue of whether the symbolism sacralizes the patriarchal structures of the ancient family or challenges its ideology.⁶⁸ Yet the God of 1 John is not a patriarchal deity, augmenting power in a selective and authoritarian way but a God of communion and solidarity, drawing human beings into a kinship community that transcends

68 See Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 103–55.

death and eliminates hatred, violence, and fear. The language for the divine being is undeniably androcentric, but it is symbolic language, not literal, portraying feminine as well as masculine images for the regenerative work of God.

Love lies at the center of this epistle: a love that arises from the archetypal kinship between Father and Son, flowing into the mutual, self-giving affection among the ἀδελφοί. For the “children of God,” the community of faith, this kinship involves not only love but also agreed upon convictions that supplant the ties of blood and bind together the siblings within the one family of God: “[t]he nature of what is mutually shared molds the character of the group.”⁶⁹ What 1 John conveys is an understanding of the church that is rooted in covenant and kinship, in an overarching narrative where hatred and fear are the antithesis of familial identity and belonging.

69 Van der Merwe, “Family Metaphorics,” 97.

Discovering Psalm 156 and Its Importance for Early Judaism and Christian Origins

James H. Charlesworth

Discovering Psalm 156

MS RNL Antonin 798 is a virtually unknown leather manuscript in the National Library in St. Petersburg, Russia. In light of my work on a critical edition of this psalm and insights supplied by world-renowned scholars, it has become obvious to many and to me that the Hebrew Psalm is ancient and was most likely placed in a cave near Khirbet Qumran. Like the *Damascus Document* and the *Aramaic Testament of Levi*, it was taken to Cairo about 800 CE and eventually placed in a Rabbinic Genizah in the Ezra Synagogue in Fostat (Old Cairo), which was constructed about 882.¹ Ostensibly, it had been found in a cave near Jericho or Qumran by Jews who were related to and perhaps Karaites. Before 68 CE, the Psalm was taken to Qumran and perhaps copied there. The exciting psalm was probably composed in Jerusalem, and perhaps in the Temple before 100 BCE, and it reflects the joy of the successes of the early Maccabees and Hasmoneans. I am pleased now to honor one of my most successful students for four years and a colleague for four decades, Reverend Professor Dr. Alan Culpepper, by sharing some personal reflections on Psalm 156.

Psalm 156 is preserved on two leather pages of a Hebrew manuscript that seems to date paleographically between the eighth and tenth centuries.²

¹ See Ada Yardeni, *The Book of Hebrew Script* (Jerusalem: Carta, 1997), 81.

² The 10th century seems to be the latest possible date for the manuscript. Its paleography is similar to the Egyptian manuscripts with a square script. See Yardeni, *Book of Hebrew Script*, esp. 80–83. The *aleph* is strikingly similar to the forms in the 8th century scroll of 1 Kings (fig. 103). The *beth* is similar to the forms in the 8th-century Genesis scroll (fig. 97). The elongated *ayin* is similar to the types found in the 8th century Genesis scroll and also in the 10th-century “Zadokite Document” (fig. 99). The elegant scribal hand of Psalm 156 seems also at times a mirror image of a pre-70 Qumran scroll, so early forms may be caused by copying. I am appreciative of the information and insights shared by Geert W. Lorein and Eveline van Staaldoune-Sulman, “Songs of David: A New Translation and Introduction,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, ed. Richard Bauckham, James R. Davila, and Alexander Panayotov, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013–), 1:257–71; see esp. 257.

The text is found on both sides of the leather and fills either 27 lines (cols. 1 and 2) or 26 lines (cols. 3 and 4). The popular term for “psalm” (תהלה) does not appear in the manuscript, but the following nouns for “psalm,” “ode,” “prayer,” “song,” or “thanksgiving,” are present: הודאה, זמיר, שיר, and תודה.³ Thus, the manuscript is a psalm, broadly defined. This psalm was composed in imitation of the Davidic Psalter and in a type of Hebrew using personal license, but with some egregious slips that could be caused by numerous stages of copying or by inelegant composition. Perhaps the Psalm was only a first draft by a priest in the Temple. Sections are superbly written and full of Semitic rhetoric and echoes from sacred scripture.

All who have only a cursory knowledge of the psalms, prayers, and odes in the *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* know about Psalms 151 to 155. While the Hebrew Bible and the Protestant Bible preserve 150 Davidic Psalms, Psalms 151 to 155 are extant in ancient collections, namely the Septuagint, the Qumran Corpus, and the early Syriac Psalter.

Some of the psalms in the “Davidic Psalter” are not attributed to David, but to Solomon or another person, and *More Psalms of David*, especially Psalms 154 and 155 in Syriac, are attributed to Hezekiah. The Hebrew of Psalm 155 (11QPs^a 155) begins without attribution or number. We cannot discern any attribution in Psalm 156, since the beginning was on a preceding page, now lost. Yet, David is heralded in Psalm 156 as God’s servant.

The Origin of Psalm 156

In 1902, Abraham A. Harkavy judged the Psalm was composed in the Middle Ages. He imagined that it may have been composed by the 12th-century David Alroy or the 13th-century Abraham Abulafia.⁴ His work is now dated by improved methods and discoveries, especially those he could not have known since the Qumran Scrolls were discovered 45 years later, in late 1946 or early 1947.

Biblical scholars, including experts on the Psalter, may not be aware of this Psalm and that the modern interest in it began in 1982. In that year, David

3 I am indebted here to David M. Stec, *The Genizah Psalms*, Études sur le Judaïsme Médiéval 57 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 5–6.

4 Abraham A. Harkavy, תפלות בסגנון מזמורי תהלים לאחד פלוני אלמוני, the article was published in the unfamiliar journal, *ha-Goren* 3 (1902): 82–85; for the comment, see 82. The title may be translated as *Prayers in the Style of the Psalms of the Psalter by an Anonymous Person*.

Flusser and Shmuel Safrai concluded that the Psalm may have originated at Qumran, but they were not dogmatic.⁵ In 1991, Ezra Fleischer opined that the text postdates the Arab conquest of the seventh century.⁶ In 1996, Menahem Haran claimed, without detailed research, that the work originates with the Karaites.⁷ In 1997, Marc Philonenko and Alfred Marx judged this work to be a Qumran composition.⁸ In 2005, Geert W. Lorein and Eveline van Staalduine-Sulman concluded the work does not seem Qumranic but shares much with the Qumran collection, and it may reflect the last phase of the Qumran Community.⁹ In 2011, Meir Bar-Ilan dated this psalm “a century or so after the destruction” of 70 CE.¹⁰ In 2013, David M. Stec postulated that this composition antedated 68 CE and was composed in Palestine.

My own focused research indicates that the Psalm was composed in Hebrew, originated in ancient Palestine before 70 CE and maybe centuries earlier. Most likely, it was created in the Temple and was taken to Qumran and perhaps copied there. It would have later been copied again, at least once, and preserved now in one medieval manuscript.

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- 5 David Flusser and Shmuel Safrai, “The Apocryphal Psalms of David,” in David Flusser, *Judaism of the Second Temple Period*, trans. Azzan Yadin, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Jerusalem: Magnes, 2007–2009), 1:265–67.
 - 6 Ezra Fleischer, “Medieval Hebrew Poems in Biblical Style,” *Te’uda* 7 (1991): 200–48 [in Hebrew]; see esp. 207–24.
 - 7 Menahem Haran, *The Biblical Collection: Its Consolidation to the End of the Second Temple Times and Changes of Form to the End of the Middle Ages* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1996), 154–69 [in Hebrew].
 - 8 Marc Philonenko and Alfred Marx, “Quatre ‘Chants’ Pseudo-Davidiques trouvés dans la gueniza du Caire et d’origine Esséno-Qoumrânienne,” *Revue d’histoire et de philosophie Religieuses* 77 (1997): 385–406; see esp. 390.
 - 9 They judge the document is from the late phase of Qumran because of the use of עולם. See Geert W. Lorein and Eveline van Staalduine-Sulman, “A Song of David for Each Day: The Provenance of the *Songs of David*,” *RevQ* 22/85 (2005): 33–59. Also see Lorein and van Staalduine-Sulman, “Songs of David,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, 1:257–71.
 - 10 Meir Bar-Ilan, “Non-Canonical Psalms from the Genizah,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Context*, ed. Armin Lange, Emanuel Tov, and Matthias Weigold, vol. 2 SVT 140 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 708. He is impressed by the diversity of Judaism then in the third century CE; but such diversity antedates, not postdates, 70 CE. The importance of the Jewish sects and groups ends in 70 CE. Subsequently, within Judaism the dominant group is clearly the post-70 Pharisees. He is also impressed that “the slaughtered sheep” (from Ps 44:23) postdates 70 or 136 CE (Bar-Ilan, “Non-Canonical Psalms from the Genizah,” 707). In Jewish liturgy the most appropriate date would indicate the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century BCE.

As I have tried to indicate in a separate publication, this psalm should be recognized as a lost Psalm of David and known by the name “Psalm 156.”¹¹ I have no doubts it is pseudepigraphical and not a psalm composed by David. Based on my edition, I wish now to focus on the importance of this Psalm for Early Judaism (300 BCE to 200 CE) and especially for Christian Origins.

The Importance of Psalm 156 for Early Judaism

Psalm 156 adds to our resources for early Jewish obsession with God in Palestine before 70 CE. God is the cosmic Judge and Creator (1.1–4) who continues to be involved in history. God has purified and renewed the nation (col. 1, lines 5–12), and forgiven “all our sins” (1.13–14).

Adoration of King David is in the mind of the author of Psalm 156. God pledged to David, who is God’s servant, and anointed him “the Shoot of Jesse” so that “righteousness and justice” were multiplied in his days” (1.15–20). David is “an eternal column,” and he broke through the wall and “the splendor of all the gentiles” (1.17 and 19d). In the future, God will support David. He will be greater than “all the angels” forever (1.21–27). The author lauds David, but he did not claim David to be “the Anointed One” or “the Messiah.”

Some Jews who lived at a time after the composition of this Psalm may have used such concepts and terms and imagined David was portrayed as “the Anointed One.” But, clear references to a Messiah who is cosmic, will change the world, and will usher in the final days appear in the messianic passages in the *Rule of the Community* (1QS) and most importantly in the *Psalms of Solomon*. As is well known, these compositions took shape in the first century BCE. The generic “messianic” innuendoes about David would seem to be dated earlier than the first century BCE.

For clarification of these interpretative reflections, I now add my translation of Psalm 156 Column 1, lines 15–20:¹²

You made a pledge ahead to David your servant,
And you anointed with compassion the Shoot of Jesse.

11 For observations that lead to this conclusion, see James H. Charlesworth, “Is MS RNL Antonin 798 Psalm 156?” This lecture presented during the 2017 SBL International Meeting in Berlin is in press.

12 The translation also reflects the insights of my colleague, Lea Berkuz.

You sustained his arm through your holiness,
For he established your praise unto the ends of the earth.

(As) an eternal pillar you set his name;
And he is breaking through the wall and rebuilding the ruins.

A cornerstone despised which the builders despised,
And you raised (him) to be head above all the nations.

Magnificence and a crown you have allowed him to inherit with
rejoicing,
And the splendor of all the gentiles you are call his name.

Righteousness and justice you multiplied in his days;
And peace and blessings forever without number.

The optimistic tone of this Palestinian Jew probably antedates the Roman incursion of 63 BCE. Following that date, according to Josephus, “we lost our freedom and became subject to the Romans” (*Ant.* 14.77).

Three visions are attributed to David (2.5–12, 3.10–21, and 4.16–23). The visions all occur in the month of Iyyar; perhaps the Psalm contained readings for certain days in the Temple. Thanksgivings, rejoicings, and blessings characterize the optimistic tone (2.13–16, 2.20–27, 3.6–9). Idol worship has ended (2.17–19), reflecting the success of the Maccabees. Signaled out for celebration is the LORD’s graciousness (4.1–7) and his incomparable mercies (4.8–12).

Psalm 156 provides evidence that early Jews imagined David was a prophet who had visions. The work supplies interpretations that seem implicit in the extant *Pesharim*, Qumran commentaries on Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and also the Davidic Psalms (4Q171, 1Q16, 4Q173). Thus, the Qumranites, following other early Jews, most likely believed that David had prophetic powers; however, I am not suggesting or implying that this Psalm was composed at Qumran.

The closest biblical passage in which David seems to be like a prophet is 2 Samuel 23; but while the passage contains a prophetic oracle, no word for “prophet” is present. The author of Acts reports that David was a prophet (Acts 2:30). David is portrayed as a prophet in much later documents, especially *Sotah* 48b in the Babylonian Talmud and the Targum on the Psalms (18:1, 49:17, 103:1).¹³ Using traditions similar to those in Psalm 156, the author of

13 See the insightful comments by Stec, *The Genizah Psalms*, 6.

Pseudo-Philo 59 attributes a “song” to David who from the “ends of the earth” will chant “my song of glory.” Reminiscent of, but different from, Psalm 156, David will also be protected by angels.

The Importance of Psalm 156 for Christian Origins

Psalm 156 increases the perception that many phrases, concepts, and metaphors found in the documents collected into the New Testament are adumbrated and even articulated in early Jewish thought. Here are eight selected examples for further research on Psalm 156 and Christian Origins.

First, Psalm 156 offers beatitudes that are inclusive of all humans; they are not focused on males. Before the discovery of Psalm 156, we possessed substantial knowledge of beatitudes in Palestinian Judaism from 300 BCE (the earliest portions of *1 Enoch*) to 132 (the beginning of the Bar Kokhba Revolt). Jewish beatitudes appear in the following documents (arranged chronologically, according to most experts):

Sirach (14:20–27; 25:8–9; 26:1)
 4Q185 (1–2 ii 8 and 1–2 ii 13–14)
 4Q525 [the Qumran Beatitudes]
 1QM (13.2)
 Romans (4:7, 8; 14:22)
 Matthew (5:1–12; 11:6; 13:16; 16:17; 24:46)
 Luke (1:45; 7:23; 10:23; 11:27–28; 12:37, 38, 43; 14:14–15; 23:29; 6:20–23)
 John (13:17; 20:29)
 James (1:12, 25)
4 Maccabees (7:15), 1QH^a (6.13–15)
 Revelation (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14)
Gospel of Thomas (54; 68–69a; 69b)
2 Enoch (58:2; 42:6–14; 52:1–15),
History of the Rechabites (14:5).

Obviously, beatitudes are found in the Old Testament, especially in Psalm 1, which many Jews and Christians have memorized.

In contrast to the focus on “man” in Psalm 1:1 and a beatitude in Psalm 156 at 1.27 in which we find a beatitude focused on “the man” (הַגִּבּוֹר), the beatitudes in Psalm 156 (3.1; 4.24, 26), as in 4Q525, *2 Enoch*, Matthew, and Luke, are generic and inclusive. Note the following:

Blessed is the one who finds glory in the desires of your will ... [3.1]
 Blessed is the one purified by your holiness; ... [4.24]
 Blessed are those who keep your commands. [4.26]

Psalm 156, like 4Q *Beatitudes* and 2 *Enoch*, suggests that Jesus lived within many types of Judaism; those to whom he was closest no longer were constrictive and dominated by males who considered women inferior. Psalm 156 thus adds to our knowledge of the esteem of women in Early Judaism, placarded by the expansive narratives in the *Testament of Job*, *Pseudo-Philo*, *Joseph and Aseneth*, the egalitarian seating in pre-70 synagogues, and the archives of Babatha.¹⁴

Second, Psalm 156 also adds to the evidence of universalism (see notes to my translation) and beatitudes that encompass all humanity. In my translation, the concept of “Adam” has been restored to its original meaning, representing both male and female. *Adam* means “human.” Notice this excerpt that also elevates David:

Above all the angels you made his greatness;
 And king of all the nations you placed him for eternity. (col. 1, line 23)

Many passages preserve the traditional celebration of Israel; but note col. 2, lines 8–12:

Because for the good of the world you have allowed me to stand before
 you.
 And for a light (to) the Gentiles you commissioned me with your
 strength.
 All the nations will recount your glory.
 For they will see your righteousness through the hand of your faithful
 ones.
 Let them gather: The officials and all the kings of the earth,
 The princes of the inhabited-world, the rulers of the human,
 So they may see the mighty (deeds) of your right hand,
 And to discern the mystery of your holy words.
 Then all of them will comprehend your might.
 For you hand, O LORD, has been doing all these things.

14 For the most recent publication, see Philip F. Esler, *Babatha's Orchard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Obviously, an interpretation of Isaiah, notably Isaiah 42 through 46 (Second Isaiah), echoes in these lines. Increasing our knowledge of Beatitudes in Early Judaism helps us understand Jesus' teachings in their original setting and not through the earlier traditions in the Hebrew Bible or later adaptations in Rabbinics. The universalism and eschatological hope found in Psalm 156 helps us understand Paul's arresting claim that all Israel will be saved (Rom 11:26), which is another echo from Isaiah, and this time from chapter 59.

Third, research and *prima facie* evidence indicate that Jesus frequently imagined he had a prophetic and messianic self-understanding; that is the case with the person in focus in our psalm. As Abraham A. Harkavy (1835–1919) stated in 1902, the psalm preserves “the prayers and praises of a man who apparently thought of himself as a prophetic and messianic figure.”¹⁵ I am convinced that these thoughts are not claims by the author of the psalm; they are attributed to David. The New Testament preserves evidence that Jesus had a prophetic and also a messianic self-understanding, as is well known and demonstrated in Professor Alan Culpepper's publications.¹⁶

Fourth, the celebration of David in Psalm 156 was composed during the period of the evolution of messianic ideology. Column 1.15–20 may be interpreted as messianic, but the term “Messiah” does not appear in it. Clearly, some Jews later probably read it as messianic, and David, “the Shoot of Jesse” is “anointed” (1.15). Jesus probably did not proclaim that he was “the Messiah,” but his followers made that proclamation central to their claims. And many Jews who claimed Jesus was the Messiah, and had been with Jesus or seen him in Galilee or Judea, referred to him as “Jesus Christ.” Some of the earliest evidence may be in Paul's life before he composed his epistles.

Fifth, David is hailed to be greater than the angels: “Above *all* the angels you made his greatness” (1.23 [*italics are mine*]). Hence, David is greater than Uriel, Michael, and other archangels. These terms and a similar claim reappear in many passages of the New Testament and in Peter's confession that Jesus is “like a righteous angel” according to Gos. Thom. 13. Does the qualifying and delimiting adjective “righteous” indicate knowledge of the evil angels (perhaps in Gen 6 and 1 *Enoch*)?

15 Harkavy, תפלות בסגנון מזמורי תהלים לאחד פלוני אלמוני, 82–85.

16 R. Alan Culpepper, “The Origin of the ‘Amen, Amen’ Sayings in the Gospel of John,” *Jesus in Johannine Tradition*, ed. Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 253–62; “Jesus Sayings in the Johannine Discourses: A Proposal,” *John, Jesus, and History*, Vol. 3, *Glimpses of Jesus Through the Johannine Lens*, ed. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, SJ, and Tom Thatcher, *Early Christianity and its Literature* 18 (Atlanta: SBL, 2016), 353–82.

As is well known, the author of Hebrews claimed that God's Son is greater than the angels: τοσοῦτῳ κρείττω γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων (1:4). Jesus' status is higher than any of the angels. Psalm 156 provides evidence that some Jews, much earlier, had used similar concepts for David. Thus, Psalm 156 adds to the insights we obtain from other challenging compositions, namely the *Self-glorification Hymn* and *nQ Melchizedek*.

Sixth, the author of Psalm 156 celebrates God's Kingdom and frequently conflates it with David's kingdom. In interpreting the psalm, I have often been impressed that God's Kingdom and David's kingdom are not distinguished. Columns 3.15 and 4.4 refer to David's kingdom. David, not God, was given "daughters of Jerusalem for the beauty of his kingdom" and God "appointed his servant, (with) splendor, and majesty, and the glory of his kingdom." But in 4.9 God's Kingdom is in focus: "I remembered the strengths and the might of his kingdom and the beauty of his might." The words are attributed to David: "Blessed be the glorious name of his kingdom forever and ever (4.14)." Hence, often the author refers to "his" and the reference could be to God or to David, the two dominant figures in this psalm. Some early Jews would see that the "kingdom" referred to David in light of God's Kingdom.

This conflation and identification helps us understand the context and meaning of Jesus' fundamental teaching: The dawning of the Kingdom of God. Specialists in Jesus Research have shown that Jesus drew on many traditions when he proclaimed the dawning of God's Kingdom, including the eschatological visions of apocalyptic Judaism, the Son of Man as Judge found in the *Parables of Enoch*,¹⁷ and the Davidic kingdom repeatedly celebrated in Hebrew Scriptures and the apocryphal compositions. The evangelists proclaimed the connection between David's kingdom and Jesus' kingdom. Notice this famous passage presented as poetry:

He (Jesus) will be great, and be called the Son of the Most High;
And the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David.
And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever;
And of his kingdom there shall be no end.

LUKE 1:32–33

17 See my suggestion that Jesus was influenced by those who were composing the *Parables of Enoch*. See James H. Charlesworth, "Did Jesus Know the Traditions in the *Parables of Enoch*? ΤΙΣ ΕΣΤΙΝ ΟΥΤΟΣ Ο ΥΙΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΥ? (Jn 12:34)," in *Parables of Enoch: A Paradigm Shift*, ed. James H. Charlesworth and Darrell L. Bock (London: T&T Clark, 2013), 173–217.

The traditions preserved in Psalm 156 add fresh insights into Jesus' world and Jesus' mind. In light of the adoration of David in Psalm 156, we may better understand why Jesus stressed that as God supported David and established his kingdom, so God is now inaugurating an eschatological Kingdom. Jesus was convinced that God shall again vindicate his people.

Seventh, the early *kerygmata* celebrated Jesus' most prominent disciples as "pillars" (Gal 2:9; cf. 1Tim 3:15; Rev 3:12; 10:1), which echoes not only 1 Kings 7:21 and perhaps Proverbs 10:25 but also our psalm in which David is called "an eternal pillar" (1.17).

Eighth, the passage that deserves intensive exploration in light of Psalm 156 is Hebrews 1:4; according to this verse, Jesus' status is higher than any of the angels; and according to 1:5–6 the "angels worship him (= the Son)." While Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Jacob, Moses, Elijah, Levi, Melchizedek, the anonymous one in the *Self-Glorification Hymn*, and others were considered angelomorphic humans by some early Jews,¹⁸ and while the Qumranites imagined that the most perfect of the Holy Ones transmogrified from an *anthropos* to an *angelos*,¹⁹ the perspectives of Psalm 156 1.23 and Hebrews 1:4 are uniquely parallel, suggesting some relation. That relation is heightened by terms shared in Hebrews 1:1–4 with Psalm 156; noteworthy are the following: "these last days" and "the glory of God." Emphasized in Hebrews, in contrast to Psalm 156, is the claim that the Son "created the world" and "bears the very stamp of his nature" (1:2–3).

The author of Psalm 156 1.18 applies Psalm 118:22 to David, but this attribution is not chosen by the author of Hebrews, although it is attributed to Jesus in Mark 12:10, Matt 21:42, and Luke 20:17 and cited as proof of Jesus' messiahship in a speech attributed to Peter (Acts 4:11), in 1 Peter 2:7, and in Gos. Thom. 66. Perhaps some of Jesus' followers knew what we learned recently from archaeology: Golgotha is a rejected quarry stone.²⁰

18 See Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence*, ABAJU 42 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1998). Gieschen demonstrates that "angelomorphic traditions played a significant role in early Christology, including the Christology found on the pages of the NT" (349).

19 James H. Charlesworth, "The Portrayal of the Righteous as an Angel," in *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism: Profiles and Paradigms*, ed. John J. Collins and George W. E. Nickelsburg, SCS 12 (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1980), 135–51.

20 See my discussion of Ps 118:22, in James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism*, ABRL 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 124–25.

The traditions in Psalm 156 enrich our exegesis of Hebrews and entice us to ponder how and in what ways these Jewish traditions shaped the origins of Christianity. The difference is between ideology and Christology. Pointing to the author of Hebrew's elevation of the Christ above Moses (3:2–6) and Abraham (since Christ is like Melchizedek; 7:4–10), Flusser and Safrai rightly claimed that “the midrashic tradition that elevates the Messiah above Abraham, Moses, and the angels antecedes the Epistle to the Hebrews.”²¹

Thus, Psalm 156 foreshadows a considerable amount of the symbolic language once thought to be the creation of Jesus' followers. It also offers *topoi* used by many authors of books in the New Testament. Again, we find how Jewish is Jesus and the Palestinian Jesus Movement and almost all the authors of New Testament works.

Conclusion

The discovery of Psalm 156 and research upon it is enriching for our evaluation of Early Judaism and for the emergence of what will be categorized as “Christian.” We now have a clearer perception of the adoration of David (going far beyond the Apocrypha and Chronicles), the visionary and prophetic understanding of David, and the optimism of God's continuing involvement with Israel, his people. We see more traditions that had fundamental importance for the mind of Jesus and his followers. These prolegomenous reflections will serve to entice other scholars to explore the anatomy of early Jewish and Christian rhetoric.

21 Flusser and Safrai, *Judaism of the Second Temple Period*, 1:273.

Encounter, Dissonance, and Reflection in the Dialectical Development of Paul's Theology

Paul N. Anderson

Since the publication of Gerd Theissen's *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology*, Pauline scholars have taken renewed interest in experiential factors in the formation of Paul's theology, but few have approached the issue in terms of Paul's own faith development in cognitive-critical perspective.¹ Just when Pauline scholarship had been "liberated" from "psychologizing the text" by Krister Stendahl's analysis of Paul and the "introspective conscience of the west,"² Theissen's monograph might have been seen to be threatening the "New Perspective on Paul," signaled by James Dunn in his essay by that name.³ However, a sustained consideration of the sociological dynamics of Paul's audiences and interests, which "New Perspective" developments have illuminated so helpfully, does not preclude the relevance of psychological factors in Paul's own experience and theological development. If anything, these two disciplinary approaches inform each other remarkably if their findings are explored dialogically, and cognitive-critical approaches to other texts and gospel traditions might point the way forward in Pauline studies, as well.

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- 1 Theissen's book was first published in German in 1983; the first publication of the English translation (by John P. Galvin) was in 1987 (Minneapolis: Fortress). Building on Theissen's work in an Eriksonian way, Terrance Callan notes distinctive phases within Paul's pre-Christian and Christian developments, including competition, zeal, boasting, and humility: *Psychological Perspectives on the Life of Paul: An Application of the Methodology of Gerd Theissen* (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 16–39. Note also Henry Cadbury's identification of six themes (or phases) that remained concurrent within Paul's concerns, reflecting something of a "prismatic" personality; Paul demonstrates ongoing concerns regarding apocalyptic, dispensations, status, cosmic conflict, ethics, and mysticism, "Concurrent Phases of Paul's Religion," *Studies in Early Christianity*, ed., Shirley Jackson Case (New York & London: The Century Co.) 369–89. Thus, both development and continuity within Paul's theological concerns and understandings are apparent.
 - 2 Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1976).
 - 3 James D. G. Dunn, "The New Perspective on Paul," *Jesus, Paul and the Law; Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990). See also the important treatment of Paul's own development, N. T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2018).

Along these lines, Alan Culpepper has made considerable contributions toward helping us understand cognitive realities *in front of* biblical texts—how the literary design of a work engages, provokes, and informs audiences and readers. This essay seeks to complement that approach by considering cognitive factors *behind* the texts of Paul's writings, just as they played formative roles in the origin, development, and crafting of gospel narratives.⁴ It is with great appreciation for the privilege of working with Alan over fifteen years on the John, Jesus, and History Project (2001–2016), following him as NT editor of Brill's Biblical Interpretation Series, and now co-editing the Johannine Monograph Series (Wipf & Stock) together, that this essay is offered in celebrating his many contributions to understanding the anatomies of biblical texts within and beyond the canonical Gospels.

While “psychologizing the text” can pose an exegetical vulnerability, even more flawed is forgetting that biblical authors were humans, failing to note the reflective dialectic behind and in front of the text regarding perception, experience, feeling, and interpretation—cognitive factors in the development and the conveyance of content.⁵ Making use of Cognitive-Dissonance Theory (Leon Festinger), Transformation Analysis (James Loder), Stages-of-Faith Theory (James Fowler), and Existential Logotherapy (Victor Frankl), this essay will consider the relation between experience and content in the theology of Paul of Tarsus regarding three central subjects: his epiphanic encounter on the Damascus road, his personal sense of mission to Jews and Gentiles, and at least two personal struggles in the light of perceived divine assistance—or lack thereof. First, however, allow me to say a bit about what I mean by Cognitive-Critical Biblical Analysis.

What is Cognitive-Critical Biblical Analysis?

As the Psychology and Biblical Studies Section of the national Society of Biblical Literature meetings has featured robust disciplinary sessions since

4 Engaging issues in front of the text is the essay by R. Alan Culpepper, “Cognition in John: The Johannine Signs as Recognition Scenes,” *NTS* 35.3 (2008): 251–60; engaging issues behind the text is the essay by Paul N. Anderson, “The Cognitive Origins of John's Christological Unity and Disunity,” *HBT* 17 (1995): 1–24 (republished in *Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures*, ed. J. Harold Ellens, Volume 4 [Westport/London: Praeger Publishers, 2004], 127–49).

5 Albert Schweitzer, *The Psychiatric Study of Jesus; and Exposition and Criticism*, trans. Charles R. Joy (1913, Boston: The Beacon Press, 1948). Walter Wink, *The Bible in Human Transformation: Toward a New Paradigm for Biblical Study* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973).

1991, my own approach within that field has sought to engage factors of epistemological origins, traditional development, existential engagement, rhetorical presentation, and audience reception with relation to biblical studies. What I call Cognitive-Critical Biblical Analysis works with several assumptions, challenging some prevalent approaches within the field.⁶

- First, biblical material is written by *subjects* (persons), not objects. Therefore, applying grids of objectivism, uniformity, and consistency over a text or its author's work is not only unscientific; it tends to be distortive. Further, despite the laudable values of consistency and coherence embraced within the modern era, expecting such of ancient writers in the Mediterranean world, especially over a diversity of genres, forms, situations, epochs, and intentions (especially the case among the Pauline writings) produces flawed inferences of "impossibilities," requiring sometimes even more problematic literary solutions.⁷
- Second, source, form, and redaction analyses, while at times being helpful in ascertaining the relation between earlier and later materials where evidence of disparate texts or forms is clear, too often diminish the voice of an author—whoever that person might have been. All too easily, text-oriented scholars project their fascination with texts onto the work of their subjects, when biblical writers may have been working with oral traditions, secondary orality, their own recollections and impressions, and echoes of free-floating themes within their situational contexts. Thus, the facile assumption that similarities involved literary borrowing from other sources, or that influence happened in only one direction (instead of allowing for dialogical "interfluence" between traditions) readily distorts

6 Paul N. Anderson, J. Harold Ellens, and James W. Fowler, "A Way Forward in the Scientific Investigation of Gospel Traditions: Cognitive-Critical Analysis," in *Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures*, ed. J. Harold Ellens (4 Volumes, Westport/London: Praeger Publishers, 2004), Vol. 4, 247–76, which includes an overview of Cognitive-Critical Biblical Analysis (Anderson) and a review (Ellens) of and a response (Fowler) to Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6*, WUNT 2/78 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996; printed in America by Trinity Press International, 1997; third printing including a new introduction, outlines, and epilogue, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010).

7 Thus, Stendahl commits an error of inferred consistency in his treatment of Paul's experience and thought, similar to Bultmann's application of *Tendenz*-critical assumptions to an otherwise unitive Johannine text. If Paul was a dialectical thinker, as was John, one's analysis might be different: with C. K. Barrett, "The Dialectical Theology of St John," *New Testament Essays* (London: SPCK, 1972), 49–69.

our understandings of how authors worked. Sometimes variance may imply familiarity; one might even disagree with oneself, in putting a point alternatively, or distinctively in a different setting.

- Third, History-of-Religions approaches, while sometimes helpful in setting a backdrop for a biblical passage, often fail when they are used in hyperextended ways. Again, a parallel with a mythic or folkloric theme or feature may inform the context or the rhetorical target of a text, but such might not imply direct derivation. Too easily it is assumed that biblical writers simply took over contemporary religious themes, non-thinkingly, allowing interpreters to characterize meanings of a text in a particular way, often contrary to the point the author was making. Therefore, if there *are* religious parallels to biblical texts—Jewish, Mesopotamian, Greco-Roman, or otherwise—asking *how* and *why* a motif is being engaged or employed relates centrally to considering the motive and meaning of the author.⁸

The results of diachronic biblical analysis over the last century or more thus function to truncate otherwise unitive texts and to try to assign differing subjects or features to different authors, editors, or sources. While some borrowing from texts did occur (especially among the Synoptic Gospels and among the Jewish historical traditions), not all of these inferences are critically solid. Indeed, tensions and perplexities within the Pauline corpus abound, but some of these may have been due to other factors involving human experience, insight, development, and reflection—let alone literary and rhetorical factors.⁹ Therefore, in seeking to pose a cognitive-critical way forward for Pauline studies, the following questions deserve consideration.

- First, what is the relation between Paul's own experience and perception with relation to the development of his own theological understandings?

8 See Cadbury's approaches to cognitive factors underlying biblical texts: Henry J. Cadbury, "Concurrent Phases of Paul's Religion," *Studies in Early Christianity*, ed., Shirley Jackson Case (New York & London: The Century Company, 1920), 369–89; "Mixed Motives in the Gospels," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 95 (1951): 117–24; "Varieties of Religion in the New Testament," *Friends Journal* 8 (1962): 120–22.

9 In any critical analysis of a classic text, its polyvalence—including theological, historical, and literary riddles and perplexities—must be considered if interpretation is to be at its interdisciplinary finest. See this additional essay honoring Alan Culpepper's good work: Paul N. Anderson, "From One Dialogue to Another—Johannine Polyvalence from Origins to Receptions," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Future of the Fourth Gospel as Literature*, *Resources in Biblical Studies* 55, ed. Stephen Moore and Tom Thatcher (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2008), 93–119.

Saul of Tarsus reports to have had an understanding of covenantal Judaism to which the Jesus movement was a perceived threat; thus, what might have caused his own change of heart (and mind!) regarding Jesus' redemptive mission and the movement of his followers? And, what sorts of experiences might Paul have had among fellow Jewish leaders and among Gentiles, whose reception of the gospel message was variable and uneven? Might Paul also have struggled existentially, even as a grounded believer, when his expectations and hopes failed or were frustrated amidst his personal struggles and sufferings?

- Second, what tools for cognitive-critical interpretation will be most serviceable within the task of seeking to understand Paul as a human being? Are there research-established disciplines that help analysts appreciate more clearly how understandings change and perceptions are challenged by contravening experiences? As cognition often seeks to reconcile differences between one's beliefs and experiences, and dialectically so, how might this have been true for Paul? Did his understandings—even post-calling (or post-conversion)—develop, and if so, how might this have happened? Might Paul's developing theological understanding not simply have related to the content of his faith, but might it also have involved developments in the structures of his understanding, helping us understand better the content of his theology? As Paul discovered new insights and meanings reflectively—not only through his sufferings, but sometimes *because* of them—how might Paul's theological reflection be understood existentially, involving the discerning of meaning and thereby transcending the limitations of suffering and death?
- Third, in taking these experiential and cognitive factors in Paul's theological development seriously, several distortions are alleviated, challenging notions of: the converted Paul, the supercessionist Paul, the perfected Paul, and even the docetic Paul. It may also be the case that more than one interpretive approach may be worthily applied to a text, and several factors may contribute to understanding its meaning and implications. Therefore, as an interdisciplinary approach to the Pauline writings, Cognitive-Critical Analysis is best employed alongside other fitting methodologies rather than displacing them.

My approach to Cognitive-Critical Biblical Analysis thus employs any respectable disciplinary approach that both provides an understanding of some aspect of human cognition—including perception, experience, reflection, articulation, presentation—and serves effectively in elucidating an understanding of a thought behind a biblical text. Any strong disciplinary approach can be applied to biblical texts, but following are four useful models.

1) Cognitive dissonance theory

Since the publication of Leon Festinger's classic study on cognitive dissonance in 1957, cognitive-critical analysts have noted several features characteristic of human perception and behavior (reducing six points to three, here).¹⁰ First, when faced with dissonance and contradictions between one's values, understandings, actions, and feelings, subjects will seek to alleviate incongruities, either by correcting perspectives or by modifying behaviors as a means of maintaining cognitive equilibrium. Second, the intensity of the drive to moderate the dissonance is in direct proportion to the importance of the issues at stake to the subject, often leading to siding with the more highly valued element; resistance to change will also be a factor of the perceived importance of the feature being challenged. Third, the drive to alleviate cognitive dissonance leads to changes in both behavior and attitude but also finds its way into expression, as the subject reflects upon his or her dialect between earlier perceptions, contravening experiences, and subsequent understandings.¹¹

Carl Rogers described the work of the therapist in a similar way. Human anxiety, according to Rogers, is often a factor of incongruity between the perceived self and the experienced self.¹² Where there is a great deal of distance between these two realities, the subject will feel a correlative sense of anxious discomfort, sometimes on the unconscious level. What the therapist contributes is a cognitive understanding of the disparity, allowing the subject first to acknowledge the incongruity and then to decide whether to modify the perceived self, the experienced self, or both. In that sense, truth is liberating, and one is enabled to make existential choices with greater self-understanding and authenticity.

2) Transformative experience theory

According to James E. Loder, knowing is primarily an event, and any such event will involve at least five stages.¹³ 1) a sense of *conflict* is felt when a surprising experience requires interpretation; 2) this leads us into an *interlude for*

10 Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957); *Perspectives on Cognitive Dissonance*, ed. Robert A. Wicklund and Jack W. Brehm (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1976); Jean-Leon Beauvois and Robert-Vincent Joule, *A Radical Dissonance Theory* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996).

11 These points summarize six principles outlined by Festinger in introducing his overall theory (1957, 11–18).

12 Carl Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications, and Theory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1951).

13 James Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981); *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).

scanning, whereby one seeks to interpret the event within one's frame of reference; 3) a working "hypothesis" emerges as a *constructive* act of the imagination; 4) as this hypothesis is tested, a sense of *release and opening* emerges; 5) *interpretation* follows, seeking to reflect on the meaning of the event and its implications for other aspects of a person's life. According to Loder, these elements of any knowing event also connect with four facets of human existence, including the lived world, the self, the void, and the holy. The knowing event also is a factor in the transition from one developmental stage to another, as facing the conflict of one's inability to deal adequately with one's experience on a particular stage of faith development facilitates transition to the next stage.

3) Faith development theory

Among the developmental theorists most relevant to biblical studies is the research-based paradigm of James Fowler,¹⁴ analyzing faith in terms of its structures and developmental movement. Of course, a great advantage of Fowler's model is that it infers the basis and character of one's faith regardless of the theological content. In that sense, while it applies to Jewish and Christian faiths, it also extends beyond them in terms of applicability. Building on the work of his Harvard mentor, Lawrence Kohlberg, but improving on it by conducting hundreds of interviews with female subjects, Fowler also posits six stages of faith development moving from embryonic child-like faith to various levels of adult faith. Relevant for our study are especially Stages 3–5. In his response to *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel* in 1999, Fowler describes his theory as follows:¹⁵

We start with the **Synthetic-Conventional** stage [Stage 3 Faith]. This stage depends upon the emergence of formal operational thinking—the capacity for “thinking about our thinking,” and the ability to use abstract concepts to capture and convey narrative and other meanings. It involves mutual interpersonal perspective-taking, where one begins to construct others' perspective upon the self, and to make an effort to understand their reactions and interpretations of our behavior. Religiously, it involves the ability to appreciate symbols as rich representations of clusters of meaning. The synthetic-conventional stage locates authority external

14 James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981); *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and the Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984).

15 Anderson, Ellens, and Fowler, “A Way Forward,” 268–70.

to the self, or in internalized versions of established authority. It does not yet have a well-developed capacity for third-person perspective-taking, in which the self sees itself and those with whom it is in relations from an independent angle. It therefore lacks the ability to analyze and achieve some measure of objectivity regarding the meanings at stake in the interchanges between self and others. Religious communities principally composed of persons best described by Synthetic-Conventional faith tend to form around authoritative leadership and to rely upon their authorizing interpretations of religious traditions.

The **Individuative-Reflective** stage [Stage 4] grows out of two decisive cognitive and emotional steps. These steps may come in either sequence, or simultaneously. First, developing the capacities for third-person perspective-taking, the person becomes capable of constructing an inquiring and evaluative approach to interactions with significant others. The relationship itself (whether with a person or a group) becomes an object of inquiry and evaluations. Ethically, this means being able to reason about just and unjust, fair and unfair relations with a new kind of "objectivity." Second, the symbols and narratives of a religious tradition, and one's relation to (or through) them[,] can be objectified and critically analyzed. With the exercise of these new capacities, the locus of authority shifts from external to internal.... The Individuative-Reflective stage, with its new analytical capacities and its confidence in conscious analysis, has less capacity for and attentiveness to the not-conscious sources of insight and distortions in personal or group knowing. It tends to disvalue symbol, myth, ritual, and non-cognitive sources of faith-knowing. This stage looks for intellectual formulations regarding faith and living that have the qualities of ideological clarity, apparent comprehensiveness, and affirmation of the possibilities of individual mastery and control.

The **Conjunctive** stage can arise from one or more sources. Central among these may be fatigue of the ego and of the conscious self from the processes of trying to manage a complex world without ways to comprehend factors that elude the cognitive structures with which they operate. For many men (and some women) the transition to the Conjunctive stage begins with an "ego leak"—an experience of failure, of fatigue or of ennui, that signals that a persistent blindsiding is going on. Vaguely one realizes that the meaning-making ego requires richer resources and ways of making sense of the self's connection to larger and deeper powers and resources. For women, it may come with the growing confidence that the spiritual limits of inherited institutionalized traditions are not adequate to sustain the affective and moral lives they are evolving. Conjunctive

faith requires coming to terms with the unconscious dimensions of behavior and of meaning-making. It involves the embrace of paradox and polarities: It means acknowledging that we are both: old and young; masculine and feminine; weak and strong; conscious and unconscious; good and evil. Paul bespeaks this awareness in Romans 7 where he says, "The good I would do, I do not do; the evil I would not do, I do. Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

4) Logotherapy and meaning-inference theory

The psychological theory of Victor Frankl argues that the primary human drive is neither toward sex nor for power, but toward meaning.¹⁶ And, rather than emphasize the introspective searching of depth psychology, Frankl advocates the transcendent reflection of height (rather than depth) psychology. Based upon three pillars, the freedom of the will, the will to meaning, and the meaning of life, Frankl helps his clients transform suffering by finding meaning in and through it. As love is the ultimate of human values, when the subject is enabled to choose a loving response to givens in life and to identify loving possibilities even in one's loss and disappointments, tragedy is transformed by the discerning of meaning. Thus, even a negative experience or loss can be redeemed by finding meaning in one's suffering, so meaning inference is the key to Logotherapy.

Experience and Content in the Development of Pauline Theology

While Paul had reportedly received training "at the feet of Gamaliel" (Acts 22:3, NRSV here and throughout) and perhaps a bit of schooling from Peter, John, and James (Gal 1:17), much of his theology appears to have developed from his understanding of the gospel in relation to his experiences. Intrinsic to such developments were his Damascus road experience, his identifying his mission as being the apostle to the Gentiles, and reflections upon his own existential

16 Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (translated 1959; revised, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962); *The Doctor and the Soul: An introduction to Logotherapy*, trans. R. and C. Winston (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963); *Psychotherapy and Existentialism: Selected Papers on Logotherapy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967); *The Unheard Cry for Meaning: Psychotherapy and Humanism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978); *The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy* (expanded ed.; New York: Meridian, 1988).

struggles and suffering. These central aspects of his theology involved cognitive aspects of development.

1) The Damascus-road christophany

As reported by Luke, Paul's encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus was the pivotal change in his life. Pre-transformation Saul, according to Luke, was "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord," bringing "any who belonged to the Way, men or women ... bound to Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1–2). As he traveled to Damascus, "suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do'" (Acts 9:3–6). The story is familiar; Saul, blinded, was led into the city of Damascus, where he was ministered to by Ananias and baptized, and whence he discovered his mission to the Gentiles as a herald of Christ as the Son of God (Acts 9:15, 20).

Interestingly, Luke presents Paul's narration of his transformative experience twice more: in Acts 22 and 26,¹⁷ but what is impressive, with Stendhal, is that here we have a transformative encounter—more akin to the callings of the Hebrew prophets, and even to the calling of John the Apocalypticist in Revelation 1—than a "conversion" from irreligion to religion. One could even argue that Paul's transformation involved a conversion *from* religion to revelation—from religious merit to unmerited grace ... but that's beginning to sound like the gospel ... well, exactly my point! Paul's unimagined, unexpected, unbidden, transformative encounter sealed his understanding of God's grace-imbued work through Christ Jesus precisely because he had encountered such himself—and personally so. Paul did not lose an argument; nor did he get swayed by superior reasoning or exegetical mastery. His becoming convinced was a factor of encounter, emerging from transformative experience, which led to a sense of calling (to use Stendahl's language) involving both a sense of mission and a message.

17 There are problematic differences in narration, such as the companions of Paul not seeing the light in ch. 9 but seeing the light in ch. 22, and not mentioned as falling to the ground in ch. 9 but all falling to the ground in ch. 26, but we'll leave those matters unresolved for now.

With the callings of the prophets (Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, John),¹⁸ the four components of a calling event are likewise here present, showing evidence of James Loder's paradigm:

- a) A theophanic encounter (in this case and in John's, a Christophanic one)
- b) An immediate sense of humbled unworthiness (falling to the ground, being blinded, fasting for three days)
- c) God's restorative work (in this case, sending Ananias to minister to Paul)
- d) Receiving a mission and a message (that Jesus is the Son of God—the Jewish Messiah)

So, here we have, in Loder's terms, a transformative event of knowing, wherein Paul realizes he was wrong about the Jesus movement, and upon experiencing a life-changing encounter, he completely switches sides within reported religious debates. The greatest persecutor of "the Way" now becomes its greatest champion, within Luke's presentation. Something of Fowler's model also comes into play here; Paul's understanding of the Jewish vocation itself also undergoes a paradigmatic shift. Whereas Paul had been operating on a Stage 3 level of faith—Synthetic-Conventional ("true believer") faith, seeking to get the Jesus-adherents to toe the line of orthodox Judaism—he moves to a Stage 4 level of faith: Individuative-Reflective (autonomous) faith, whereby he comes to understand the Jewish promise completely differently as being fulfilled through the work of Christ, not threatened by it. This, then, grows into Paul's own understanding of salvation by grace alone, through faith, which he then supports with Jewish Scripture and other forms of rhetoric and argumentation. Thus, Paul's profound understanding of the life-changing gift of grace bears with it an intrinsically autobiographical element if there is any correlation between his experiences, mission, and message as reported by his companion Luke and in his own writings.¹⁹

18 For a fuller treatment see Paul N. Anderson, *Receiving Holy Callings, and Being Wholly Responsive* (The Quaker Lecture, Western Yearly Meeting, Plainfield, IN, 1985).

19 One is aware of the critical difficulties of taking the writings of Luke and Paul at face value and seeking to make connections between them; however, operating within the scope of "Second Criticality," to question a traditional inference is not to overturn it. See Paul N. Anderson, *From Crisis to Christ: A Contextual Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2014), x–xii.

Before we leave the scene, though, one further feature of the narrative is worth considering—the fleeting mention of Saul's witnessing (and approving of) the martyrdom of Stephen. If something like Paul's epiphany really happened, did Christ simply appear to Paul, out of the midday blue, or might there have been predisposing factors contributing to an experiential opening? While the Lukan text is silent on the matter, one wonders if the stoning and exemplary death of Stephen, who prayed as a Christ-figure that his killers be extended grace—despite their lack of deservedness—might have piqued the conscience of the Synthetic-Conventional “doctrinally correct” and zealous Paul. Luke mentions briefly that Saul looked on approvingly with the stoners' coats laid at his feet (Acts 7:58). This undoubtedly would have created a great deal of cognitive dissonance for all onlookers, but the fact is that Paul brings it up again in his own narration in Acts 22, which raises the question as to whether Paul linked the two events within his own reflection, introspectively or otherwise. In that account, Paul expresses his own sense of guilt over persecuting Christians as piqued by his witnessing of Stephen's innocent blood being shed (Acts 22:19–21):

And I said, “Lord, they themselves know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And while the blood of your witness Stephen was shed, I myself was standing by, approving and keeping the coats of those who killed him.” Then he said to me, “Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.”

About this encounter, Paul writes in Galatians (1:11–16):

For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles....

Thus, both in Luke's narration and in Paul's reflection, cognitive factors are apparent, even centrally, in the transformative “opening” that changed Paul's life, however it may have transpired. Might such experience and reflection have

impacted Paul's depth of understanding regarding the character and meaning of grace? The possibility cannot be denied.

2) Paul's sense of mission to the Gentiles

Another central feature of Paul's theology regards his sense of mission to the Gentiles, but how did that develop? Did he always feel a concern to reach the world beyond the household of Israel, or did his consigning Peter's and his ministries as being apostles to the Jews and the Gentiles, respectively, result from experiential and reflective factors? Of course, the reader is drawn into the omniscient word of the narrator, who cites the Lord as saying to Ananias, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15), and yet the Gentiles' receiving the Holy Spirit is described as something of an unexpected gift, as Cornelius and his entourage experienced an outpouring of the Holy Spirit as Peter preached the gospel in Acts 10:44–45. So, initially, it appears that Peter has been granted the mission to the Gentiles, and to some degree, such is true.

From there, the Church at Antioch felt the Spirit's leading to set aside Paul and Barnabas, sending them off on their first missionary journey in Acts 13. On Crete and in southern Anatolia they preached in local synagogues, where some Jews believed, and so did some Gentiles. At Pisidian Antioch and Iconium, Paul's preaching was successful, but some Jews were threatened, and they stirred up the crowd against them. In Lystra, oppositional Jews came and won the crowd over, leading to the stoning of Paul and leaving him for dead (Acts 14:19). Returning to Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas reported the great success among the Gentiles, despite their uneven reception among the Jews in Asia Minor. So, did Paul feel called to a Gentile mission originally, or did the relative failure of his mission to Jews in the synagogues in Asia Minor, followed by the surprising success of his somewhat default mission among local Gentiles, lead him to say to the Jews in Pisidia (Acts 13:46–47):

It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

From this angle, it appears that cognitive dissonance forced Paul to look for an alternative meaning regarding his calling—re-envisioning it as a mission to the Gentiles as a direct factor of its uneven success. Indeed, the successes of the ministries of Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles were narrated at the

Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, but so was that of Peter. On his second missionary journey, Paul continues to visit first the Synagogues in the region, expanding now to Greece and Asia Minor (including Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus), but upon a negative reception in Corinth, Paul reports in Acts 18:6 that from then on he would go to the Gentiles—apparently an additional reaction to cognitive dissonance.

Paul even puts it in his own words in both Galatians and Romans, clarifying in Galatians 2:7–9 that the distinction of Peter's and Paul's ministries as being to the circumcised and the uncircumcised, accordingly, was a factor of the relative success (and lack thereof) of their missions. It also suggests the carving out of evangelistic turf between these two leaders as a factor of dissonance between their kerygmatic emphases.

When they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter making him an apostle to the circumcised also worked through me in sending me to the Gentiles), and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

In Romans 11:13–14 Paul even asserts that his mission to the Gentiles is an indirect means of achieving his erstwhile mission to the Jews—perhaps making them jealous over their own inheritance, as a cut-off branch might envy the grafted branch (see also 1 Tim 2:7) and thereby seek to be rejoined. “Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them.” Thus, concerning Stendahl's noting of Romans 9–11 as the socio-religious interest of Paul's concerns regarding salvation by grace through faith, this too may have been a factor of Paul's reflection and cognitive dissonance.

Extending the cognitive-critical analysis here, we also see aspects of Paul's faith development as a formative factor in his emerging sense of mission. In Fowler's terms, we see here a movement from Stage 4, Individuative-Reflective Faith—believing that God had called Paul to witness to Christ as the Jewish Messiah, to a Stage 5, Conjunctive Faith—seeing that mission as not only including the Gentiles, but indirectly and potentially reaching the Jews as a factor of having extended the gospel beyond them to the Gentiles. An additional paradoxical discovery, perhaps, involves the fulfillment of God's promise in Genesis 12:1–3 not simply to create a great nation, but also to bless the world

through the Seed of Abraham, as grace availed through Christ to the nations is extended as a covenant of promise (Gal 3:6–18).

Therefore, while Luke presents a reflective inference of Paul's initial divine commissioning as being an apostle to the Gentiles, the narrative of Acts and even Paul's own reflections suggest that such a mission was both a default and a serendipity—even dividing up the missionary turf between his mission and that of Peter, and finally coming 'round full-circle to reach the object of his earlier mission to his fellow Jewish nation by means of extending the gospel to the Gentiles. Viktor Frankl might even describe this final element as "paradoxical intention"—by aiming at one thing, an alternative discovery is facilitated—although such a feature is clearer in Paul's experience with suffering.

3) Paul, existential struggle, and suffering

Regarding Paul's existential struggles, it seems odd that the same person who wrote "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13) would also say, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (Rom 7:15). Likewise, how could one who claims, "If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more ... as to righteousness under the law, blameless" (Phil 3:4–6), also say, "For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it" (Rom 7:18)?

Kümmel, Stowers, Jewett, and others, of course, have argued that Romans 7 involved the rhetorical I—a "speech-in-character" form of Greco-Roman diatribe, suggesting that Paul was not referring to himself but to struggles that others might have had, despite his first-person references.²⁰ After all, Paul uses this trop elsewhere, and Gerd Theissen points out the rhetorical features of the questions, "What then shall we say?" and "What then" in Romans 6:1, 15; 7:7 regarding the law and sin.²¹ Indeed, Paul is addressing members of his audience, who either preferred antinomian grace, or who in bondage to the

20 See W. G. Kummel, *Romer 7 und die Bekehrung des Paulus*, UNT 1 7 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1929); Stanley Kent Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul's Letter to the Romans*, SBLDS 57 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1981); Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia, 2nd Edition, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006).

21 Theissen, *Psychological Aspects*, 177–265. Arguing for Romans 7 as autobiographical are James D. G. Dunn, "Romans 7, 14–25 in the Theology of Paul," *TZ* 31 (1975): 257–73; Michael Paul Middendorf, *The "I" of the Storm: A Study of Romans 7* (Saint Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1997); Will N. Timmins, *Romans 7 and Christian Identity: A Study of the I in its Literary Context*, SNTSMS 170 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

law might have forfeited grace, but it cannot be ruled out that his first-person references might also have been to his own dialectical experience, even in post-conversion maturity. While many have argued that the sense of inadequacy of humankind under the law in Romans 7 references a pre-conversion state, it is doubtful that any mature Christian should be struggle-free in terms of fleshly existence. Such a view reflects a docetic view of the sanctified life, which Paul also claims to have experienced. Rather, what we more realistically have in Romans 7:7–24 is an experiential dialectic.

- a) On one hand, Paul believes that the Spirit will deliver believers from the power of sin, not just its consequences. Paul can testify to being “more than conquerors” (Rom 8:37), and that having learned to be content with much or little, God has indeed supplied his needs according to his riches in glory (Phil 4:11, 19). Paul believes in and has experienced divine empowerment and provision, and he holds that this should be the sanctified Christian baseline.
- b) On the other hand, Paul knows from experience that fleshly battles with sin are never entirely over, despite the larger war having been won. While valuing the Law as a gift leading to liberating conviction, it may also be considered a source of bondage, leading to dismal feelings of existential failure. With the Jesus of the Markan Passion narrative, Paul would doubtless have agreed that “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mark 14:38).
- c) Despite his struggles, however, Paul apparently also received divine assistance and empowerment through the Holy Spirit—a theme continuing, then, with ascendancy in Romans 8. With Käsemann over against Bultmann, I affirm that, while receiving the Righteousness of God is indeed a factor of being regarded as righteous—rightwised—because of grace, receiving God’s Righteousness is also substantive: the believer also receives the power of the Holy Spirit to deliver the individual from the grip of carnality and sin.

Such, however, is never a matter of perfected status; rather, it allows multiple victories precisely because the believer—even post-conversion—faces multiple existential struggles. Even a transformed heart and mind still face fleshly contingencies of human existence. Therefore, Paul must have sensed cognitive dissonance over believing that being in Christ meant victory if he indeed experienced struggles, temptations, and even occasional “failures” (at least by his own measures), leading to dialectical reflection and consternation. Nonetheless, he can also say—about himself, and not just a rhetorical

other—that “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death” (Rom 8:2).

4) Paul, physical pain, and existential transcendence

A second existential struggle for Paul, however apparently involved an unsuccessful bout with suffering, whereby he requested three times that God would remove his “thorn in the flesh,” yet to no avail. Here Paul’s prayers did not lead to the liberating response he desired, yet his petition did not go unanswered. Rather, the word of the Lord was that “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). Here, Paul’s cognitive dissonance went unresolved. Rather than give up on his faith in God, Paul, in Frankl’s terms, transcended suffering by finding meaning in it. Within Fowler’s model, we again have a movement from a Stage 4 autonomous conviction to a Stage 5 dialectical appraisal of disappointment, suffering, and loss. If God’s power can be shown in human weakness, the affliction ceases to be for naught. Rather, it may yet further Paul’s larger purpose as an ambassador of Christ and a herald of his grace, not despite experiential challenges, but precisely because of them.

Elsewhere Paul describes his being “afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor 4:8–9). Perhaps Paul’s anguish with unanswered prayer in chapter 12, followed by the promise that God’s power is perfected in weakness provides the key to his being able to say at the beginning of his second letter: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God” (2 Cor 1:3–4). Again, with Frankl, when pain is accompanied by the inference of meaning, suffering is transformed into sacrifice, and redemptively so.

Conclusion

While many challenges abound in seeking to comprehend the existential Paul and the dialectic between his perceptions, experiences, and emerging understanding, the venture is not only worthwhile, it is essential for understanding the origin and character of his theological content. Within a Cognitive-Critical approach to Paul, his transformation, mission, and teachings are better comprehended, and thus better applied. In so doing, this essay attempts to take up the mantle laid down by Jim Fowler some 20 years ago:

I would like to see Anderson's approach carried over into the interpretation of Pauline theology as well. It seems to me that Paul cries out for interpretation via conjunctive epistemology. Holding together the witness of Jews and Christians (Romans 9–11), affirming the duality and tension at the heart of human beings and in himself (Romans 7), and affirming both that there is a transforming relationship with Jesus Christ ("If anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation") and a gradual process of maturation in faith ("When I was a child, I spoke like a child ...") suggests that Paul Anderson could faithfully spend a scholarly life-time continuing his fruitful work.²²

In the light of this cursory analysis, Professor Stendahl makes a good point; right. Paul was not a Lutheran.²³ Nor did his "conversion" involve leaving a life of debauchery and sin behind, after which he "found religion." Indeed, Paul's transformation was along the lines of the callings of the prophets in Hebrew Scripture; and yet, those developments from encounter to a sense of mission were by no means devoid of introspection or conscientious reflection.

In the light of Cognitive-Critical Biblical Analysis, Paul the robust apostle also reports having experienced disappointment, frustration, discouragement, disillusionment, and at times even failure. As Stendahl himself notes, Paul was faced with "weakness," and he struggled to maintain integrity. Nonetheless, it is precisely through those experiences of crisis, cognitive dissonance, empowerment, and reflection that meaning was discerned, and a sense of mission and message emerged. Perhaps those developments were also factors of grace in the experience and reflection of Paul, and such may have influenced his sense of the gospel message from the beginning of his ministry to the end.

22 Anderson, Ellens, and Fowler, "The Way Forward," 2004, 272.

23 Such is the case made by Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective* (1986, revised, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); likewise, John was not a Quaker. Paul N. Anderson, "Was the Fourth Evangelist a Quaker?" *Quaker Religious Thought* 76 (October, 1991): 27–43, although the issues faced by Johannine Christianity were formative in virtually all egalitarian and spirit-based Christian traditions.

Sit and Listen; Go and Do: The Parables of the Good Samaritan and Prodigal Son in Howard Thurman's Life and Thought

David B. Gowler

I am delighted to contribute to this *Festschrift* honoring the life and work of Alan Culpepper, a volume that celebrates both the depth and breadth of Alan's meticulous, innovative, and insightful scholarship. This essay focuses on one lesser-known aspect of Alan's diverse body of work: his contributions to reception history.

I first became aware of Alan's interest in reception history in 1987. During a weekly lunch with his doctoral students, we discussed an essay Alan was writing, an analysis of Gore Vidal's novel, *Lincoln*. In that study, Alan argued that Vidal's *Lincoln* was "an American Gospel" that included a "redeemer myth" pattern in which Abraham Lincoln functions in many ways as a Jesus figure in a story consisting of "the public life of a hero from his inauguration to public office through the events that establish the influence of his spirit after his atoning death."¹ I was intrigued—my doctoral research would explore characterization in modern, ancient, and biblical literature²—but also mildly surprised that a New Testament scholar like Alan would publish such an article, which, it seemed to me over three decades ago, was only remotely connected to the "real" work of a New Testament scholar.

In recent years, my own scholarship has increasingly focused on reception history.³ As Alan realized many years ago, careful analyses of the use and

1 R. Alan Culpepper, "Lincoln: An American Gospel," *Foundations and Facets Forum* 4.2 (1988): 33–34.

2 David B. Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy and Friend: Portraits of the Pharisees in Luke and Acts*, Emory Studies in Early Christianity, vol. 1. (New York: Peter Lang, 1991; paperback edition: Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008).

3 Some examples (books only): *James Through the Centuries* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Press, 2014); *The Parables after Jesus: Their Imaginative Receptions across Two Millennia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2017); Howard Thurman, *Sermons on the Parables*, ed. and intro. David B. Gowler and Kipton E. Jensen (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2018). Most of this essay stems from research done for the Thurman book I co-edited with Kipton Jensen, and I am grateful for his reading of that work.

impact of the Bible in society and culture—including literature, visual art, music, plays, poetry, and film—are not only interesting and historically important; they can, since modern interpreters stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, also provide significant insights into biblical texts themselves. This essay, for example, focuses on one area in which Alan's scholarship and mine converge: Howard Thurman and the parables of Jesus.

Howard Thurman (1899–1981)

In the history of the Civil Rights movement, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., deservedly casts a long shadow. That shadow, however, often can obscure the myriad others who struggled, suffered, and sometimes died in the movement. It also can eclipse the many people who “prepared the way” for the still-continuing struggle for civil and human rights.

Although Howard Thurman never considered himself a “movement man,”⁴ he is one of those overlooked heroes because he played an important role in providing some of the theological underpinnings of the Civil Rights movement. Thurman thus deserves to (re)emerge from the shadows and take his rightful place as someone who helped pave the spiritual path upon which King and others would soon tread.⁵ One example of his significance is that Thurman was one of the first African Americans to travel to India, meet with Mahatma Gandhi, and incorporate Gandhi's insights into his own theology/philosophy.⁶

Thurman was born in West Palm Beach, Florida, in 1899, and grew up in Daytona. A brilliant student, Thurman graduated as valedictorian of his high school in St. Augustine, Florida (1918), of Morehouse College (1923), and of Rochester Theological Seminary (1926).

Thurman pastored Mount Zion Baptist Church in Oberlin, Ohio (1926–1928), before moving with his family to Atlanta, Georgia, to teach religion at Morehouse College and Spelman College. In 1932, after the death of his

4 Albert Raboteau, “In Search of Common Ground: Howard Thurman and Religious Community,” in *Meaning and Modernity: Religion, Polity, and Self*, ed. Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Stephen M. Tipton (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 157–58.

5 Thurman was a nationally and internationally recognized figure during his lifetime. In 1953, for example, *Life* named Thurman as one of the twelve “Great Preachers” in the United States: *Life*, April 6, 1953: 126–32.

6 Thurman's influence is likely seen in King's own incorporation of Gandhi's nonviolent resistance with the religion of Jesus. Cf. Martin Luther King, Jr., “My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence,” *Fellowship* 24 (1958): 4–9.

first wife, Katie (in 1930), Thurman began teaching at Howard University in Washington, DC, where he also served as Dean of Rankin Chapel.

In 1935–1936, Thurman was elected chairman of the “Negro Delegation” on a Pilgrimage of Friendship sponsored by the World Student Christian Movement. Thurman and his new wife, Sue Bailey Thurman, traveled to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Burma (now Myanmar), and India on a preaching tour that included their momentous meeting with Mahatma Gandhi.

After Thurman’s lengthy journey in India, he described his ministry as “an exploration of the problems that arise in the experience of people who attempt to be Christian in a society that is essentially un-Christian,”⁷ an exploration that would lead him to write his compelling and best-known book, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, which served as an inspiration for many Civil Rights leaders.⁸ In that book, Thurman observes that historical Christianity differs from the religion of Jesus in fundamental and troubling ways. Thurman reminds us that Jesus primarily spoke to those oppressed by the powerful and that Jesus’ prophetic message continues to be relevant to the oppressed in any age and in every place, in ways not completely understood, acknowledged, or accepted by many who claim to follow him.

In 1944, Thurman left his tenured position at Howard to serve as co-pastor of an interfaith and interracial church in San Francisco, California: The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples. In 1953, he accepted a position as Dean of Marsh Chapel and Professor of Spiritual Resources and Disciplines at Boston University, becoming the first African American to be Dean of Chapel at a predominantly white university.⁹ Thurman retired from Boston University in 1965 and returned to San Francisco, where he lived until his death in 1981.

Howard Thurman, Alan Culpepper, and the Parables of the Good Samaritan and Prodigal Son

My scholarly interest in Thurman was stimulated when Kipton Jensen of Morehouse College asked me to join him in exploring a treasure trove of

7 Howard Thurman, *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman*, vol. 2 (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2012), xix.

8 Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon, 1996; Abingdon, 1949). Martin Luther King, Jr., several people report, often carried this classic work in his suitcase on his many journeys.

9 He joined Martin Luther King, Jr., at Boston University, where King was finishing his doctoral course work in the School of Theology.

recordings of sermons by Thurman that are housed in the Special Collections at Pitts Theology Library of Emory University. As a result of that research, Jensen and I selected fifteen sermons by Thurman on the parables of Jesus for a book we edited together.¹⁰ In the process of that work, I discovered that the parables of the Prodigal Son and Good Samaritan are foundational to Thurman's life and thought.

An interesting prolegomenon to that argument, however, is how Alan Culpepper's discussions of these two parables interact with Thurman's interpretations, both directly and indirectly, as the following examples from Culpepper's 1995 commentary on the Gospel of Luke illustrate:

The Good Samaritan

Culpepper offers this reflection on the Good Samaritan parable and the story immediately following it, Jesus in the house of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:25–42):

Neither the story of the Good Samaritan nor the story of Mary and Martha is complete without the other. Each makes its own point—the Samaritan loves his neighbor, and Mary loves her Lord—but the model for the disciple is found in the juxtaposition of the two. To the lawyer, Jesus says, “Go and do,” but he praises Mary for sitting and listening. The life of a disciple requires both.¹¹

Thurman's sermons on the parables also insist that a fundamental aspect of “the religion of Jesus” is to *sit and listen* in the quietness so one can experience the spirit of God and, therefore, ascertain the will of God:

No one of us can live unto himself no matter how hard he tries. We are so deeply involved in each other and in others that often it is difficult to determine where we begin and the other leaves off. And perhaps in the quietness we may sense the mystery and the wonder and the magic of our relatedness, and in that relatedness become aware each after the pattern of his own sensitiveness of the emergence in our midst of the living spirit of the living God in whom we live and move and have our being. What we discover here in the quietness may inform all of the boundless,

¹⁰ Howard Thurman, *Sermons on the Parables*.

¹¹ R. Alan Culpepper, “The Gospel of Luke,” in vol. 9 of *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 232.

limitless spread of mankind everywhere to the end that what we do we know must be done with an eye singled to its bearing upon the least and the greatest, the wisest and the most foolish, the meanest and the righteous of all the children of men.¹²

Note that for Thurman, as for Culpepper, that time of quietness, that time of listening to the spirit of the living God, necessarily leads to an awareness of our interrelatedness as human beings and, therefore, should lead to ethical actions, to *going and doing*. As Thurman argues:

Do not shrink, then, from that which turns up in your road, suddenly making of you an ultimate demand. Know that if you respond with all that you have, your little life takes on a meaning in the light of which even death itself is a little thing. To miss it because of fear, timidity, pride, arrogance, self-righteousness, deceit, to miss it is to wander down your road in darkness, and what a darkness, what a darkness it is for you.

Go thy way, all things say. Thou hast thy way to go. Thou hast thy time to live. Do thy thing. Know thou this that there is no other who can do for thee that which is appointed thee of God. So go thy way and do thy thing.¹³

Key to Thurman's understanding of parables, the religion of Jesus, and religious experience itself is his insistence that personal transformation, the coming to oneself and therefore coming to God, is the foundational first step that leads to all other transformations of self and society. One's personal, inner transformation should lead to social action, and social transformation is possible because of our own inner transformation and the guiding hand of God our father. *Sitting and listening* is a prerequisite for, and must be followed by, *going and doing*.

12 Thurman, *Sermons on the Parables*, Chapter 7: "The Rich Fool," 68–69. Although Thurman's life and work bear witness to Thurman's belief in gender equality, his use of masculine nouns and pronouns is disconcerting if not offensive to modern readers. After much reflection, however, I transcribed Thurman's sermons as he delivered them in the 1950s, and I ask readers to remember that the most recent sermon Thurman preached that is cited in this essay is over sixty years ago.

13 Thurman, *Sermons on the Parables*, Chapter 11: "The Great Moment," 115.

The Prodigal Son

In his reflection on the Prodigal Son, Culpepper quotes Thurman's autobiography as Culpepper explores the deeper implications of why the "journey home begins with coming to oneself":

Howard Thurman, who shared his struggles and pilgrimage as an African American minister and educator in his autobiography, *With Head and Heart*, found that this parable offered a new insight as he reflected on the meaning of the Christian faith in bringing us to ourselves:

"For I believe that Jesus reveals to a man the meaning of what he is root and essence already. When the prodigal son came to himself, he came to his father....

My mind and spirit churned in a fermentation of doubt and hope. I was convinced that there was no more crucial problem for the believer than this—that a way be found by which his religious faith could keep him related to the ground of his security as a person. Thus, to be a Christian, a man would not be required to stretch himself out of shape to conform to the demands of his religious faith; rather, his faith should make it possible for him to *come to himself* whole, in an inclusive and integrated manner, one that would not be possible without this spiritual orientation."¹⁴

The profundity of Thurman's insights into these two parables—what he often calls "simple stories"—deserves further explorations, including the quotation from Thurman's autobiography that Culpepper begins to examine.

Two Foundational Parables in Howard Thurman's Life and Thought

At first glance, Jesus' parables may not seem central to Thurman's theology or even a primary concern of his biblical interpretations. Upon deeper reflection, however, it becomes clear that the parables of the Prodigal Son and Good Samaritan are at the heart of Thurman's religious thought and experience.

Thurman's sermons on the parables primarily focus on how they should be applied in one's life, but they also include insightful observations about how

14 Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," 304–305. Thurman, *Head and Heart*, 115, 120 (italics added by Culpepper). On April 5, 2007, Culpepper was inducted into the Martin Luther King, Jr. Collegium of Scholars at Morehouse College, the alma mater of both Thurman and King.

parables *work*, how they are effective rhetorically by their use of particular words, images, or other aspects of their composition, including their dialogical nature and ambiguity that stimulate our imaginations and, hopefully, our actions. Thurman admires, for example, the genius in Jesus' stories, the turn of phrase—such as the priest in the parable of the Good Samaritan “walking by the other side”—or the mysterious and curious absences—where is the mother, for example, in the parable of the Prodigal Son? Such details, Thurman argues, give ample evidence of Jesus the storyteller's “consummate touch of genius.”¹⁵

*The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32)*¹⁶

In the context of Luke's Gospel, the younger son represents such people as the tax collectors and sinners who are coming to Jesus (e.g., they “acknowledged the justice of God”; Luke 7:29), and the elder son illustrates people such as the Pharisees and scribes in Luke (who “rejected God's purpose for themselves”; Luke 7:30). Jesus tells the three “Lost” parables of Luke 15 (lost sheep, lost coin, and lost sons), in fact, to Pharisees and scribes who grumble about Jesus welcoming and eating with sinners (15:1–2), just as the older son gets angry and refuses to join the celebration over his sinful brother's return (15:13, 28–30).

The parable, as it is found in Luke, portrays God as a father welcoming back the prodigal with joyous, compassionate, and loving arms *and* as a father who shows love and forgiveness to his elder son by seeking him out, assuring him (“all that is mine is yours”; 15:31), and urging him to celebrate his brother's return. He reminds his elder son, who had refused to acknowledge the prodigal as his brother (“this son of yours”; 15:30) that the two sons are indeed brothers (“your brother”; 15:32), thus gently reinforcing family ties, underlining the necessity of reconciliation, and attempting to reestablish community—a fact that is extremely important to Thurman.

This open-ended parable—does the older son join the celebration?—reflects the still unanswered question in Luke of whether the Pharisees and scribes will respond positively to Jesus' invitation. The lack of resolution also functions as a powerful way to ask readers of Luke the same question: Will they join God their father and celebrate the return of “prodigal” sinners?

15 See Thurman, *Sermons on the Parables*, Chapter 3, “The Prodigal Son,” 19 (preached on September 23, 1951); and Chapter 5, “The Good Samaritan,” 50 (preached on October 7, 1951).

16 Since, for Thurman, the Prodigal Son parable better represents the preparatory *sitting and listening* of religious experience, I will examine it first.

Thurman's Interpretations of the Parable of the Prodigal Son:
A Redemptive Experience

While a graduate student at Rochester Theological Seminary, Thurman spent his summers as an assistant pastor at a church in Roanoke, Virginia, where his duties included leading Vacation Bible School for the youth in the church. One summer, Thurman several times had to exclude one particularly difficult boy from class because he was creating an intolerable situation for the other youth. As a result of being excluded on previous occasions, on the last day of the program, the boy refused to attend the final party. As Elizabeth Yates describes it:

Howard urged [the boy] to join in with the others.

“But you put me out,” the boy said. It was a fact he could not get beyond.

Looking at him, yearning to see him take his place in the group, Howard felt that he had somehow failed the boy.

...

What was involved, Howard asked himself, in the loss of an opportunity to relate meaningfully to another human being? Even if the boy might sometime feel sorry, that would not redeem the time that had been lost now. When the prodigal son returned to his father—and Jesus had ended his story at the point where his hearers could pick it up—did he wrestle till he died with the problem of how he could ever redeem the time interval during which his relationship with his father had been ruptured? The wheel of time could not be made to turn back, *but any experience could be made redemptive* [emphasis mine]. These experiences would be happening all through his life, Howard realized, and he reached deep to get meaning for himself in this particular one.¹⁷

That story illustrates how the parable of the Prodigal Son is a recurring emphasis in Thurman's thought, one that continually compelled him to explore how to create redemptive experiences in order to build community. Thurman's reflections on community that are inspired by the parable of the Prodigal Son unsurprisingly revolve around the family relationships of the three main characters in the story.

In this light, the poem, “The Prodigal Son,” by Thurman's friend, the poet James Weldon Johnson, provides an apt introduction to the ways in which Thurman interprets this parable:

¹⁷ Elizabeth Yates, *Howard Thurman: Portrait of a Practical Dreamer* (New York: John Day, 1964), 73–74.

But Jesus spake in a parable, and he said:
 A certain man had two sons.
 Jesus didn't give this man a name,
 But his name is God Almighty.
 And Jesus didn't call these sons by name,
 But ev'ry young man,
 Ev'rywhere,
 Is one of these two sons.¹⁸

As Johnson's poem suggests, an examination of the three main characters of the parable of the Prodigal Son is key to understanding the parable, and it is a path that Thurman follows, albeit with some distinctive contributions:

God the Loving Father

In his interpretations of the parable, Thurman stresses that the father illustrates the love, compassion, and forgiveness of God, as well as God's desire to restore community with and among human beings. All three "lost" parables in Luke 15 tell us what God is like: God is like a shepherd who searches for and rejoices when he finds a lost sheep; God is like a woman who searches for and rejoices when she finds her lost coin; God is like a loving father who runs out to greet his returning prodigal son, forgiving him, and welcoming him back into the family. God is like a loving father who goes out to entreat his elder son to join in the familial celebration of restored fellowship.

The Restoration of the Younger Son

Many if not most interpreters understand the "came to his senses" in Luke 15:17 as indicating that the younger son repented. Thurman recognizes, however, that the parable itself is ambiguous about whether the younger son actually repents; although the Lukan context certainly implies it, the parable leaves open the possibility that the younger son may again be manipulating his father. When the younger son asked for his inheritance prematurely, for example, he plays his father for a fool. Likewise, the wording in the parable makes it unclear whether his realization (when he "came to himself") constitutes repentance or is merely a plan of action to make sure he does not starve; readers of the parable can raise significant questions about his motives and sincerity.¹⁹ Thurman, however, does not explicitly question the prodigal's sincerity; for him, the main problem, the most important thing, is that the son had forgotten that he was

18 James Weldon Johnson, "The Prodigal Son," in *God's Trombones* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 21.

19 Thurman, for example, ambiguously paraphrases "came to himself" as "it occurred to him": Thurman, *Sermons on the Parables*, Chapter 3, "The Prodigal Son," 30.

his father's son. He had lost his family and his community, but now he was coming home.

Thurman continually stresses that the younger son was restored to community. A distinctive element in Thurman's interpretation of the younger son, however, stems from his mysticism-guided vision: that human beings discover God within themselves.²⁰ Thurman relates this insight in a conversation he had with a Buddhist man in Colombo, Sri Lanka (in 1924/25). The man commented that the Buddhist students he knew who attended Christian schools in Sri Lanka became "spiritual drifters," people who not only abandoned their own faith but who also did not become Christians. Thurman's response is fundamental to understanding his Christian mysticism and the impact it had on his interpretation of the Bible:

It seems to me that Christian education has succeeded if it makes a man an authentic Christian, or it may make him a better and more completely devout Buddhist. For I believe that Jesus reveals to a man the meaning of what he is in root and essence already. When the prodigal son came to himself, he came to his father."²¹

Thurman also uses those exact words in his 1951 sermon, "The Prodigal Son," where he is even more explicit about their implications:

"When [the prodigal] came to himself," he came to his father. That when I ... come to the very center, the very core of myself, then I come face to face with God. That God is, God is within me. That he is the very point of my being and existence.... [T]hat there is that of man which is God. Not a reflection of God. Not some staggering accent of God, but that which is God."²²

For Thurman, then, *sitting and listening* is essential because that is when God is revealed within us and to us.

The Call to the Older Son to Celebrate the Restoration of Community

Like most interpreters, Thurman spends a great deal of time reflecting on the younger son but very little time discussing the older son. Both sons, the parable makes clear, became at different times estranged from their father—out of a

²⁰ See Thurman's appropriately titled, *The Inward Journey* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

²¹ Thurman, *Head and Heart*, 114–15 (cf. Culpepper's citation above).

²² Thurman, *Sermons on the Parables*, Chapter 3, "The Prodigal Son," 34.

true family relationship or fellowship with God their father—and both need to be restored into God's family, into fellowship with their father and into fellowship with each other. Thurman, as always, emphasizes the restoration and preservation of *community*. He also stresses that this lack of fellowship with God impacts our relationships with other human beings—a loss of the community that also sustains us.²³ The younger brother is restored; whether the older brother is truly restored remains to be seen, although God the father searches for his son, assures him of his love, and entreats him to rejoin the family.

Thus, along the lines of Johnson's poem, Thurman indicates that anyone can be a prodigal returning—or needing to return—home to the father, and anyone can be the elder brother being asked to join the celebration (and sometimes human beings can be both). If we are similar to or identify with the younger brother, what does the parable *want* from us, Thurman asks? It wants us to “come to ourselves,” to return to fellowship with God. If, however, we are like the elder brother, the parable wants us to join in and celebrate the restoration of community, a move that also involves ending a self-imposed estrangement from God.

In the many times Thurman refers to the parable of the Prodigal Son, the focus is always on God's love and the implications of that love for human existence. His sermon, “The Love of God,” is an example of how his concern about *the experience of love* greatly outweighs any concern about the nuances of the Scripture text itself:

Jesus, as he began to think aloud of how the love of God operates, told the story about the prodigal son. The most important thing in the story is not so much the fact that the prodigal son was forgiven by his father, though that is important and crucial, and very exciting and wonderful, and very redemptive. But the thing that I see in it always is that the boy had to purify himself by his self-judgment because of the way in which he had violated the relationship between him and his father. His father forgave him, but how could he forgive himself? He had to find ways by which he could redeem his life from the lacerations inflicted upon it by his own willfulness. Meanwhile, the creative attitude of his father's love held firm the context, the climate, the atmosphere, in which the boy could work out his salvation.

23 In a 1957 sermon on the lost coin and the lost sheep, Thurman argues that fundamental to the religious experience and insight of Jesus is that the loss of community can be a “deadly thing”: Thurman, *Sermons on the Parables*, Chapter 2, “The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin,” 23.

It seems to me that this points up an important thing about the love of God. In the religious experience, the individual finds fulfilled what he has glimpsed in his other experiences of love: namely, that in the presence of his God he becomes aware of being dealt with totally. Whether he is a good person or a bad person, he is being dealt with at a point beyond all that is limiting, and all that is creative, in him. He is dealt with at the core of his being, and at that core he is touched and released. With insight, with wisdom, with patience, with courage, with devotion, with commitment, he can now deal with the facts of his own life; and he will seek to introduce all these qualities into his relationships with his fellows.²⁴

This application leads to another dialogic aspect in Thurman's approach to the Bible in general and to the parables in particular. On the one hand, Thurman's sermons engage with fundamental, universal realities of human and religious experience, yet, on the other hand, they translate those ultimate realities into concrete, practical messages for his congregation to apply in their daily lives. Thurman's sermons are never merely instructional: they also involve guidance, inspiration, conviction, and dedication in the communal experience of God's all-embracing presence in the worship service. In addition, Thurman's sermons, as do the parables of Jesus, challenge his listeners, as he notes about his ministry in The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples:

The core of my preaching has always concerned itself with the development of inner resources needed for the creation of a friendly world of friendly men.... It was my conviction and determination that the church would be a resource for activists—a mission fundamentally perceived. To me it was important that individuals who were in the thick of the struggle for social change would be able to find renewal and fresh courage in the spiritual resources of the church. There must be provided a place, a moment, when a person could declare, "I choose!"²⁵

Those words illustrate how Thurman envisions the transition from *sitting and listening* to *going and doing*, which becomes even more clear in his interpretations of the Good Samaritan parable.

24 Howard Thurman, *The Growing Edge* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1974), 67–68.

25 Thurman, *Head and Heart*, 160.

The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37)

The second parable foundational to Thurman's life and thought is the Good Samaritan. His interpretations of this parable illustrate how he envisions moving from the spiritual aspects of religious experience to the practical needs in the lives of his congregation and then to the needs of the local and larger community. The motivation for such actions comes from within, from the recognition, as proclaimed by Jesus of Nazareth, that one's religion should be "God-centered," that we should expect "God to invade the normal processes of life," and that "we are called upon to work with [God]."²⁶

The parable of the Good Samaritan clearly had a tremendous influence on Thurman's life and thought, and, like the parable of the Prodigal Son, the best lens through which to interpret Thurman's understanding of the importance of this parable is through the perspectives of its various characters and how people should or should not identify with them.

The perspective of the wounded man. Thurman does not often dwell on the parable from the point of view of the wounded man by the side of the road, but this perspective is at the heart of his own life and religious experience. The most apparent evidence for the essential nature of this perspective in Thurman's thought can be found in a seminal event in his early youth that Thurman relates numerous times throughout his career. He even dedicates his autobiography to this mysterious person: "*To the stranger in the railroad station in Daytona Beach who restored my broken dream sixty-five years ago.*" This stranger—who Thurman had never seen before and would never see again, to his knowledge—functions as a paradigmatic Good Samaritan whose benevolent actions, Thurman believes, totally changed his life.

One of the times Thurman relates this story is in a 1953 broadcast of "Face to Face" on NBC, a version that is more expansive than most of his retellings of the encounter:

We are all of us indebted to a host of others whose names we do not know, whose faces we may not recognize, and yet sometimes we do have the personal encounter with the individual who does come to our need at a particular moment when the need is most acute.

I remember many, many years ago, when I was just beginning to enter high school, and I was going from the little town in which I lived to a larger city where I would have the opportunity for attending a high school, because, at this period in my state, which is the state of Florida,

26 See Thurman, *Sermons on the Parables*, Chapter 13: "Who is my Neighbor?" 127.

there were only two public schools in the entire state that were open to me. I had been able to get an old trunk from a neighbor, and into this trunk I put my few worldly possessions, and I went down to the railway station to purchase my ticket and to check my trunk. I did this just a few hours—maybe an hour or two—before the train was due to leave. When I went to check my trunk, I was told by the ticket agent that he could not check my trunk because according to the law, the tag must be attached the trunk itself, not to some part, some rope or something of that sort, that tied the trunk, but it had to be attached either to the handles or some other part of the trunk. Well it happened that this old trunk which had been given to me had no handles, and therefore there was no place on the trunk to which the tag could be attached. And the rather unsympathetic ticket agent said, "You will have to send this to Jacksonville by railway express." I only had enough money to buy a ticket and, perhaps, a dollar and fifteen or twenty cents left over, and when he said this, I found that the cost of expressing the truck was about a dollar and seventy-five cents. So my dreams were gone, and I sat on the steps of the railway station, weeping, as we say, crying my eyes out.

And then, when I opened my eyes so that I could see just a little, I saw two rather large feet just in front of mine. And then my eyes crawled all the way up the full height of this man whom I had never seen before. He was in the act of taking a bag of Bull Durham smoking tobacco out of the jacket that he was wearing, and he opened this bag of tobacco, and then he reached in another pocket and took out a cigarette paper, and all with one hand, the left hand, he emptied some tobacco in the paper, rolled it rather deftly, sealed it with saliva, put the cigarette in his mouth, took his teeth and pulled the cord of the sack of tobacco until it was tight, put the tobacco in his pocket, took a match out of another pocket, struck the match on his thumbnail, lighted the cigarette, took a deep draw, and then he said to me, "Boy, what are you crying about?" And then I told him. And he said, "How much does it cost?" I said, "Oh, about a dollar seventy-five cents." And then he said, "Come with me. If you're trying to get out of this town, to get an education for yourself, the least I can do is to help you." So, he paid for the express charges on the trunk. When the receipt was given to him, he handed it to me, and then he wished me well, turned, disappeared out of the door, walking down the railway track.

I had never seen him before, nor have I seen him since, but because of what he did that particular morning, it was possible for me to begin the long pilgrimage which has led to all of the variety of experiences of my life.

We are all indebted to people whose names we do not know, whose faces sometimes we are not able to see. Therefore, the sense of gratitude, the sense of being indebted to life is one that should not cause one to be depressed or to feel as if one were in some manner weighted down with obligations which he cannot pay or cannot repay. But rather should it give to one a sense of putting at the disposal of sensed needs all around one, some of the private resources of the person, which the individual has accumulated through years of living and through being the recipient again and again of things which have come without merit and without desert. This idea that our lives are lived open to the world without this feeling, without this experience, life would not be possible at all. I am not myself alone, but I am a part of all the life that breathes through me and through which I breathe. We are all of us indebted to a vast host by which we are surrounded.²⁷

Thurman observes that our knowledge of being indebted to God and being indebted to other human beings should fill us with a sense of gratitude for these blessings and, as a result, a spirit and a desire to help others just as we have been helped.

The Perspective of the Good Samaritan

An interpretation of the parable that focuses primarily on the wounded man seeks to answer the lawyer's question in Luke 10:29: "And who is my neighbour?" The answer, of course, is that our "neighbor" in this instance is the wounded man by the side of the road. Jesus, however, asks a different question in Luke 10:36, one that is the flip side of the same coin: "Which of these three, do you think, [proved to be] a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" That question focuses on the role and responsibility of the Samaritan, as the lawyer reluctantly admits (i.e., he cannot even bring himself to say the word "Samaritan"; instead, he says, "The one who showed him mercy"). In response, Jesus tells the lawyer that he has the same role and responsibility to all human beings: "Go and do likewise."

The majority of Thurman's interpretations of the parable of the Good Samaritan focus on this aspect of the parable: our responsibilities to and for other human beings. This approach is based on his belief that the transformation of society ultimately depends on the transformation of individual human beings and that personal transformation—the actualization of the presence of

27 Transcribed from the audio of this broadcast housed in the Special Collections of Emory University's Pitts Theology Library.

God in one's life—includes the building of human relations and true community, and it could be achieved through the life, message, and personal example of Jesus of Nazareth.

An essential element of this creation of community is Thurman's insistence that we should act as "Good Samaritans" because we are truly "related" to each other as children of God in a sacred community of humanity. We are not related by race, creed, or nationality, and we should not act simply because there is need, no matter how great: We act because we become involved in an encounter from the core of ourselves to the core of other human beings, an inward community that then manifests itself as an outward community. Thurman thus uses the parable to challenge our assumptions about our relatedness, our community, our family. Jesus had insisted that "true family," for example, was determined by working relationships (e.g., Mark 3:35: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother").²⁸

Compare Thurman's recollection from his summer work in a church in Roanoke, Virginia, in 1924, of how a Muslim from Africa reacted when he found out that there was a Baptist church for whites only and a Baptist church for Blacks only: "In the Moslem religion there would be no such distinction made.... Allah laughs aloud in his Mohammadean heaven when he sees the Christian spectacle: the First Baptist Church White, and the First Baptist Church Colored."²⁹ As Thurman's ministry at the groundbreaking Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples demonstrates, he strove to obliterate such human-erected boundaries between people and the construction of "in-groups" and "out-groups," but he started first and foremost with the transformation of individual human beings and the community that arose from that transformation.

The Perspective of the Priest and Levite

Thurman also does not often dwell on the perspective of the priest and Levite in his interpretations of the parable of the Good Samaritan—he tends to focus on the positive aspects of community—but in his autobiography, Thurman wryly relates how one of his students reminded him of the possibility that any person, including respected religious figures, could act as the priest and Levite did in the parable. When Thurman became Dean of Marsh Chapel at Boston University and professor in the School of Theology, he was asked to teach a homiletics class, and in the second half of the semester, he required his students to give extemporaneous short sermons. Thurman relates what happened when he assigned a student to preach extemporaneously on the parable of the Good Samaritan:

²⁸ See Thurman, *Head and Heart*, 194.

²⁹ Thurman, *Head and Heart*, 195.

One day, I opened the Bible to the story of the Good Samaritan and handed it to a student. He read the story aloud, closed the Bible, and said, "I will give you a modern version of that story. Two days ago, just as it was getting dark, a man was walking by the School of Theology, when another man jumped from behind the hedges and attacked him. He was assaulted and robbed, then pulled off the sidewalk. In a few minutes, the dean of the School of Theology came out of the building and passed where the man lay. He was on his way to a meeting of the Ecumenical council downtown and his mind was full of agenda items. He did not see the man at all; he did not even hear his groans. The next person to come by was the dean of the chapel [i.e., Thurman]. He had just finished a discussion on Meister Eckhart. His mind was trying to work out the difference between God and the Godhead in Eckhart's interpretation. He did not see the man at all; he did not even hear his groans. The next man to come along was Bob Ward, the custodian at the chapel. Bob saw this man and said, 'My God! What the hell happened to you?' He called to a security guard and said, 'Call the hospital and get an ambulance over here right away. I'll try to make him comfortable until the ambulance comes.' When it came, Bob said, 'Take care of this man. I am due at the hospital for my own treatment tomorrow and I'll drop in the emergency room and take care of the bill.'"³⁰

Thurman relates the story partly because he found it humorous, but what is also interesting—besides the way in which the young man both implicated Thurman as being the Levite in the parable and relieved Thurman of some of the negative implications in the parable (e.g., in the parable, both the priest and Levite see the wounded man and move to the other side as they pass by him)—is that his retelling of the parable incorporates a significant switch in the character with which people, especially Christians, tend to identify. Instead of being identified with the wounded man who is saved (often interpreted allegorically as Christians being saved by Jesus) or with the Good Samaritan (by showing mercy to others in God's name), Thurman is identified instead with the Levite, and his error (or sin) is simply being too preoccupied with aspects of his daily life even to take notice of someone in need. Although the parable is still domesticated of most of the radical message inherent in it (the context of hatred between Jews and Samaritans made the "good" Samaritan a character whose inclusion and actions in the story would be shocking to

30 Thurman, *Head and Heart*, 176–77. As Thurman writes in *Jesus and the Disinherited*: "Every [person] is potentially every other [person's] neighbor" (89).

most if not all of Jesus' listeners), it still retains the important warning that all human being should "Go and do likewise" by showing such mercy to all human beings whenever possible.

Conclusion: Sit and Listen; Go and Do

One of my father's favorite sayings was, "If all else fails, read the instructions." That humorous advice is both insightful in its analysis of human behavior in general and applicable in many areas of human endeavor. One must *sit and listen* before one can effectively *go and do*.

What both Thurman and Culpepper argue in their own distinctive ways is that the proper response to the teachings of Jesus is, first, to sit and listen, to reflect, experience, and understand. Yet, as Thurman and Culpepper also contend, an encounter with the teachings of Jesus—truly understanding his message—involves more than intellectual assent; it means "to go and do." Jesus' teachings, including these two parables, not only *challenge* us to act; they *demand* that we act. Understanding must lead to concrete action in the world, because truly understanding Jesus' radical message creates in us a profound moral obligation to reflect, decide, and act accordingly, whether by working for civil and human rights, promoting justice in the midst of oppression, seeking peace among those who advocate for war or, in other words, proclaiming good news to the poor, release to the captives, and liberation of the oppressed (Luke 4:18).

As Thurman says about love being an "encounter that leads from the core of me to the core of you":

What about it? Now, I don't know whether it makes sense to you or not, but that isn't important either. Are you willing to try that? Are you willing to try it, really? To work at it? And if you work at it—*really* work at it, despite all the things that we know about the psychology of relations and all the learned things—if you really work at it, you can depend upon this: That there will open up to you, more and more, the strength to keep on working at it. Not to achieve it—that is beside the point—but that is the *assignment of man*, and the degree to which he stays in school and works at it, to that degree is it a reasonable thing to dream about a time when this world will be a decent place for friendly men underneath a friendly sky. Let's try it and see.³¹

31 Thurman, *Sermons on the Parables*, Chapter 5, "The Good Samaritan," 56.

Epilogue



A Closing Tribute to R. Alan Culpepper

Gail R. O'Day

I am honored to contribute to this volume that celebrates the career of R. Alan Culpepper and his contributions to New Testament Studies—Johannine Studies in particular. In preparation for my comments here, I read *The Johannine School* and *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* back to back in chronological sequence. The introductions to both books are meticulously researched and written with compelling clarity. That they so thoroughly inhabit different scholarly conversations is unmistakably clear. Indeed *The Johannine School* seems to be the jumping off point for Culpepper's critique, in the introduction of *Anatomy*, of his own prior perspective on historical reconstruction as a guide to John's meaning.

That one scholar could make this methodological transition so carefully and persuasively in the early stages of his career is reason enough for an honorific volume. When we recall that his books still have a lingering impact on his field of study, this *Festschrift* is all the more apt.

Alan began his academic career with a dissertation that documented in creative and engaging detail hypothetical historical layers in the composition of the Fourth Gospel. *The Johannine School* could have had a subtitle that ironically anticipated the dramatic turn his work would take, such as "Anatomy of the History and Formation of Johannine Traditions."

As is well known, the heart of Alan's methodological turn is to focus on the narrator of the gospel story, who is identifiable by the way she/he tells the story, not by locating him/her as a personage documented in early Christian history. The narrator's identity emerges from the intra-textual details, not from hypotheses about the extra-textual, as had been the governing assumption prior to *Anatomy*. Culpepper's analysis highlights the deliberate decisions and choices of the narrator to order events and tell the story in particular ways, so as to achieve particular effects. The narrator in John is quite explicit about this strategy (see, e.g., John 20:30–31 and 21:25). Culpepper's approach allows the reader to step back and absorb the story without an immediate rush to historical or theological judgment. A step back to observe creates a space to engage and critique what is actually before us, not what we surmise is before us.

The essays in this volume demonstrate the breadth of scholarship that has been influenced by *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*. Every contributor owes a debt of gratitude to Alan for opening this new conversation about the gospel

text and discovery of the narrative gifts of the gospel literature. In my own case, Alan generously shared an early draft of *Anatomy*, which offered a disciplined frame for my own literary critical inclinations emerging as I wrote my dissertation at the same time. For this I am continually grateful. More broadly, his approach has helped make reading the Gospels less dogmatic and intimidating, and far more accessible, to students and readers at every level. What a wonderful gift to have given!

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